A Quarterly of New Literature

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AUTUMN 1960

ACCENT
ANTHOLOGY

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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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M. M. LIBERMAN:

Kovach

When Milt Montefiore asked someone on the lip of the crowd what was going on, he was not very surprised to learn that Old Man Kovach was up there, even though Kovach was at least eighty, maybe older. How an old man could get so far up a tree was a great deal less important to him than his relief in learning that his kids were O. K. He could imagine Aaron, say, squashed in the street like a rotten plum.

Milt took out a red handkerchief and blotted the fat on the back of his neck and puffed out his greasy cheeks to relieve the tightness in his chest. For the moment he was too tired to walk the rest of the block to his flat. All day the heat had been almost too much for him and a couple of times he had felt sick to his stomach. The store was awfully hot because Mr. Kreen believed air-conditioning gave his employees "sinus." So, while the crowd mumbled and tittered about Old Man Kovach, Milt just stood there with his doublebreasted jacket thrown over his wet shoulder and rubbed his eyes with his knuckles, watching, reluctantly fixed, as the spots became sparklers—a little bit of childhood come back. The sensation made him momentarily dizzy. Once Milt had found some things wonderful but that was before he began to think of himself as middle-aged. He was nearly forty-three and the last few years had tightened his clothes, loosened his teeth, stripped his head like a worn straw doormat, letting the freckles show.

Life was, well, . . . life was. . . . Oh, hell, you took it pretty much as it came. That's right, you took it as it came and you did your best because it was, well, serious business, and if you had a wife and couple of kids, you tried to make a decent living and you minded your own business, if you weren't some kind of jerk. Sometimes, however, in the middle of the night, Milt was scared right out of his sleep. But everybody dreams. It's important not to let things get you down.

Besides, everyone knew that Old Man Kovach was no ordinary nut. Still a dozen or so of Milt's neighbors, including four or five brownskin kids on bicycles and two yawning cops leaning on their prowl car, kept looking up into the tree as if, perhaps, they expected the old man himself to tell them what to do. Instead, he sat there idiotically in a crotch just out of reach, refusing with his foot to let the cops put up their ladder, making sounds halfway between a giggle and a whimper. To hell with him, thought Milt, and he suddenly felt enraged and exhausted. If he could get a nap before Dolores gave him something to do, maybe he would have some appetite for dinner. He headed down the block cursing the weather and fools and warning himself not to lose his temper, no matter what.

Cooking smells like boiling leather hung in the place. Dolores, lying in bed with a wet washrag over her eyes, asked him to change Sara-Debbie and not let the beets boil over. Aaron kept asking what he could do with himself because the kids on the street were calling him wop again and wouldn't let him play with them. And what about Old Man Kovach? When was he coming down? This Aaron asked in a tone plainly accusing, as if Milt knew and wouldn't tell. "I guess he's the only friend I got," he explained petulantly, throwing himself on the floor and propping his feet on the couch, and for this Milt slapped him a hard crack on his thigh. But Aaron refused to cry, having been proved right.

From the bedroom, Dolores whined faintly that Aaron had no one to play with and that he had driven her crazy all day. Aaron could settle this himself, Milt thought. He'd be goddamned if he was going to start fighting with neighbors because their kids were a bunch of little bastards. "When *I* was ten years old," he bellowed, "I had to handle these things myself." In St. Louis, when he was a kid he had it a hell of a lot tougher than Aaron. The only thing worse than being a Jew with a dago name was maybe being a nigger with a Jew name, which wasn't really bad because then they just laughed at you. He had gotten himself slapped around plenty, but meanwhile

he had cracked a couple of heads on his own and if the other kids had never liked him, they had at least learned to leave him alone. But Aaron was different. He was, just as Milt had been, big for his age, but unlike his father he hadn't learned to take care of himself. Goddamnit, you can't make people like you, but you can learn to take care of yourself and then it doesn't make any difference. That's how he had gotten where he was. He had worked himself up from stock clerk to straight-salary salesman in a department store that had never before hired a Jew, but by the time they found out he wasn't Spanish or Italian, he had hung up a store record for living room rugs. Not bad for a kid from the slums of St. Louis who had never seen his father and whose mother had left him when he was five in the care of a hard-of-hearing sixty-year-old aunt who always smelled of dead fish. I haven't got much, he was fond of thinking, but what I got I got on my own and not by jumping into it every time some shnook yelled shit.

At the table Milt carved a leg of lamb while Dolores, unrestored, pleaded with Sara-Debbie to sit still while she put a bib on her. Milt stopped to send Aaron from the table to wash that damned mud from his hands. Aaron left on command but stopped midway to honk like a goose, a new compulsion. Milt's face blotched red and then corpse-white and he muttered, "Jesus Christ, what a kid," and Dolores said, "Take it easy," and sighed.

Some women after ten years of marriage get plump and sweet. Not Dolores. She was no longer even remotely pretty and when she wasn't irritable and ailing she was resigned and sullen. Some men have dough and position and homes in the country by a lake. They play golf. They sail boats. They feel good. They're lucky because they have a lot and they enjoy it. But others have even more and enjoy nothing. These guys are worse off than I am, thought Milt, as he tried to get interested in the mint jelly. He seldom admitted that he no longer found his wife attractive and that his kids didn't seem very bright. But when he did, he always reminded himself that, given the early circumstances of his life, he was lucky to have anything at all and he wasn't going to be one of those jackasses who noodies himself into an early grave wanting what he can't have. He wanted only to feel pretty good. He wanted to see Dolores smile once in a while. He wanted Aaron to grow up to be a mensch. That's all he wanted. When Dolores took the baby to pottie, Milt finally asked Aaron how Old Man Kovach had gotten up into the tree in the first

place and Aaron said that some older boys had boosted him there.

"You mean he *asked* them to get him up there?"

"Yeah," said Aaron, pretending to love lamb.

Milt had first met Old Man Kovach downtown waiting for a bus. That was eighteen months ago when the Montefiores were new to Bird Street and the two stood there strangers. Milt had taken a puff or two on a cheap cigar another salesman had given him and it tasted bad so he threw it into the gutter and this old man, looking like a burlesque comedian in his oversized trousers and little dentless hat with rim turned up all around, went straight for it, smiling his bashed-in smile, and now holding a cigar in each hand and aware of the look of unalloyed disgust on Milt's face, said, shrugging guiltily, "One of these days, I know it, from picking up from the street cigars, I'm going to get it a cancer. Don't argue, I know it."

"Who's arguing?" Milt said. "Throw it away before you catch something worse."

"What could be worse? But you're probably right. Probably, anyway, it's no good, a cheap."

"No probably to it."

"You know?"

"Of course I know. Didn't I throw it away?"

"That's very true, very true," and then a moment later: "What kind cigar is it?"

"I don't know. Don't bother me. An El Ropo. Who knows?"

"El Ropo, El Ropo. From this kind cigar I never heard. Anyway," he said knowingly, "I couldn't take it on the bus because on the bus there's all kinds, especially women, that don't like to hear the smell cigars."

By this time Milt knew others were listening and laughing and he felt as if he had been pushed against his will into some kind of conspiracy against the old man and it made him feel vaguely ashamed. He was especially relieved to see the bus approach. He was about to take a seat when he was aware of the old man standing and he offered it to him, but the old man just smiled, uncovering the pink and grey of his mouth, and putting his hand on Milt's arm, said, "That's all right, never mind. You're a good boy." Milt felt uneasy all the way home. There was a sour taste in his mouth and a pocket of gas was making his heart beat extra fast. He stared resolutely out of the window. When he saw the old man getting off too, he walked as

fast as he could with his head down and reached home puffing. As he closed the door behind him, he could see the other entering a house near the corner, by the big tree, and he thought he saw him wave.

Months later, when Aaron failed to come home for dinner, Milt at first refused to search for him, arguing that the boy was old enough to know when to come home, but Dolores wept, pleading that something might have happened and Milt had to admit this was possible in that neighborhood. It was bad enough when they moved in, but in less than a year it had gotten worse. On the same day, two houses on Cupper Street were said to have been broken into. And there were always reports of women being bothered on the streets at night. The cops were around plenty. Even Milt, who from time to time insisted he had nothing against "the colored," knew that no matter how you felt about them, they were not just like whites, more wild, always getting into trouble. Milt, too, would have joined the big parade to the suburbs, but that took more money than he could ever hope to have. He wasn't going to kill himself working. Moving to the suburbs was against his principles.

"What do you mean principles?" Dolores had wanted to know. "Is it against your principles for Aaron to every day be chased by the bums around here? Pretty soon Sara-Debbie goes to school. Will *you* pick the lice out of her hair or will that too be against your principles?" Then she began to cry, and because he didn't know what else to do, Milt got angry and pointlessly walked three times around the block, remembering finally that Aaron was lost. How is a man to explain to anyone that he has gone as far in his life as he can ever expect to go? This no one is prepared to hear. He doesn't really hear it himself. Is it something you talk about? To who, then, anyway? No, you just feel it, a dull blade scraping your heart as if it were an old potato. Milt finally found Aaron in the old man's house, eating sour cream, cucumbers and radishes and listening stupidly while the old man talked and laughed.

Old Man Kovach had taken it upon himself to instruct Aaron, whose unhappiness, he explained to the boy, he had noticed. He had seen him on the street, lonely, or running from the others; he had passed his house when his father's voice rang loud over the dinner sounds in exasperation and anger and he had heard Aaron retaliate by making the noises of barnyard fowl; he had heard him make his mother cry. This was shameful in the eyes of the goyim and even

more so in the eyes of God who scarcely anyone believed in any more, but who would surely (if not tomorrow, then next year or ten years from now) have his terrible say and then this boy, Aaron, who sat in front of him, his eyes bulging, half in fear and half in wonder, would really have something to be unhappy about. *And only then.* As for himself, he no longer paid proper tribute to God, but that was another matter; in any case God lived. He was to be reckoned with. And if there was a God to be reckoned with, just so much was mankind to be held in contempt. How old was Aaron? Thirteen? Fourteen? Or ten? Even so, in three years, he would be a man. He was old enough to understand. Mankind was to be pitied and laughed at, and this anyone, even a ten-year-old boy, could do, provided one thing—provided he was *in* this world and not *of* it. Did Aaron understand? Look, you made like a cockeye. One eye in the gutter, one in the sky.

How could a man fear—feh, it was absurd, degrading to think of it, like dreck on his tongue—how could a man fear other men, when any man in his heart, if he wasn't like a cow, stupid, he knew there was a God who this minute was sick with disgust at the bag of ashes the whole human race had made of everything he, God, had created, including mankind itself? Did it make sense to be afraid of such creatures, who were alive only because God had not yet decided to strike them dead? Who but an idiot could think so, eh? Aaron sat, transfixed, his forefinger in his nose, as the old man beat the table with one fist and his breast with the other, explaining that while only God himself knew what was in his heart, he, Kovach, played the fool for everyone.

Did Aaron suppose that he made himself the butt of every pig's joke because he feared people or wanted their pity or because, God forbid, he was such a schlimazel that he didn't know he was being laughed at? Ha. Yesterday. He, Kovach, knew what he was doing, don't worry. If anything, God was too patient and maybe it wasn't for him to think for God, but what had God given him a brain for if not to think? He had thought a lot. He had decided that he could move God to move, understand? The spoilers who thought of nothing but food, money and women. These he would tantalize to their own destruction. The more he tantalized them, he said, his eyes narrowing, his face so close to Aaron's that the boy was dizzy from his breath's black stench,—the more he teased them, gave them the irresistible opportunity to yield to their cruel, brutal and swinish impulses, the

closer he was to being at one with God on *that day*. Meanwhile he knew that God hated him, because he, Kovach, had forsaken his own father, had promised to rescue him from the ghetto and instead, when he had the money, forgot him, married, raised a son, a good-for-nothing bum, who had taken *his* money, tricked him, gave him just enough, you see, to live on and let his mother die among goyim in a stinking hospital, downtown. Now, a pox on his penis, he tongues whores and lives in a racetrack. Tears rolled down the old man's face as he whispered, "A big mistake I made. I told God he did me enough. If not, He should go in hell." He wiped his wet mouth with the back of his hand. "Take a piece cake. Go home. Be a good boy. Tomorrow, if I live, I'll take you a walk." And Aaron obeyed. That is, he tried to be a good boy and when there was no one to play with, in the days that followed, he climbed the flight of stairs to the old man's flat, until that day his father found him there and grabbed his arm roughly and asked Old Man Kovach what the hell he thought he was doing and the old man just smiled and, hunching one shoulder, said to Aaron, as if giving him leave to go, "To your father pay attention."

Donald Pool and Wilton Gleason were always together, riding their bicycles, looking wistfully at automobiles, usually bored. Sometimes they let Orville hang around with them, even though he was really a niggerkid. Orville was very light-skinned and his hair was almost blond. He was extremely well built, though thin. Sometimes they would have nothing to do with him, figuring that if worse came to worst the two of them could handle him. Orville didn't seem very smart, so either way it didn't seem to make much difference. Old Man Kovach, seeing them every day of the summer spitting, kicking rocks, wrestling each other to the ground, looking petulant and perplexed at the haughty fourteen-year-old girls, disapproved of them. Bums. When Donald and Wilton weren't conspiring against Orville, that is, when they were disposed to tolerate him, something seemed to go out of their lives, especially when there was no money for a movie. This day, they took to picking up Aaron, Donald holding one leg, Wilton the other, and turning him upside-down, bouncing him on the sidewalk, only hard enough to make him scream in pain but not hard enough to draw blood. And when Old Man Kovach saw this, he came over as fast as he could, waving his arms yelling to stop. "Blow, fish-peddler," said Donald, who was more articulate than Wilton. Orville looked uncomfortable. They seemed ready to bounce

Aaron again, but he was really too heavy, so they let him drop a couple of inches with a clunk, but on the dirt just off the sidewalk. They didn't want the old man to call the cops. Anyway, they were unsatisfied by the way all this had turned out, so Wilton raced Aaron to his hat which lay in the gutter and tossed it fifteen feet into a tree. Of course, they laughed and whooped wildly when Old Man Kovach ordered them to get it down but when he announced that, in that case, he would get it himself, they were suddenly quiet at the thought of the elegant possibilities. Orville said he thought he would get on home, but Donald said nothing doing. He heard what the man said, didn't he? Orville was going to help him up the tree. At this, Aaron came awake, although he seemed to understand no more of what was happening than he had in Old Man Kovach's place. He could only put his hand on the old man's arm and say, "I can get it myself, or maybe my father can get it for me," but the old man turned on him, annoyed. He had talked and talked, but the boy had understood nothing. Up went Kovach, with Orville's help, like a duck on a chandelier, fluttering.

Aaron sat but now refused to eat. Dolores pleaded, Milt raved, Sara-Debbie looked frightened but it made no difference. Aaron kept insisting that Milt didn't like Old Man Kovach. Otherwise he would get him down. At first Milt forbad Aaron to mention it further, but knowing how Dolores was about the kids not eating, he knew, too, he would have to give in eventually and at least talk about it. How, he asked Aaron at last, could he be expected to get the old jackass down when the cops couldn't get him down when they for Christsake had the equipment to do it? Aaron wanted to know why the cops couldn't get him down and Milt explained that he didn't *want* to come down and they couldn't force him to come down without maybe making him fall out of the tree and killing himself, which, he added, wouldn't be such a bad idea, at which Aaron gave out a wild scream and shoved his food on the floor. Then he ran into his room, shouting over his shoulder, "God sees people."

Later Milt explained to the policeman with the spotlight about how Mr. Kovach might listen to *him* and the policeman scanned his face suspiciously as if he were reading the map of some exotic country and said, "O.K., but if the old crock knocks you on your butt don't come crying to headquarters." And long after Aaron picked up his hat, Milt and Old Man Kovach lay on the grass, cold, like lovers.

NANCY SULLIVAN:

Celebration and Requiem

i—at the station

As I await the train beside this ghost-green station
Under these vacant trees that line the arbitrary spaces
With unknown sidewalks as in read-about places,
Harsh flutterings suddenly shuttle in and out my heart
In hushes, with purple, terrible, painted-on faces:
Hawks askew, perched on a dream's resurrection.

Memory, at this cormorant vigil, is all at once in action,
And awaiting new agains with the old friends soon
To usher through that knell of hellos at noon,
I recall the horizontal poles of a cagey life,
My own; and wing back, fledgling at this rune,
To chant again in a plain song of celebration

Of creed, digit, and letter in this initialed primer:
Annotations of strum and dirge from the wayward Mays
Of me, lyric in navy jumper on those Mary-blue days
At school, or on contralto scaling in Central Park
Exploring rooty pluckings of magic, crannied ways
For use here: Rhyme'ster, rime' ster (rim'ster), n. Rhymer.

ii—a matinal

Balloons, balloons are everywhere.
The spectacle of the morning rises
On the faint string of day. Everywhere
Shouts and hurrahs of what will be.
I lean on the sill of this morning window
Alive through the concessions of the night
To a vision of the paradox of death
Guileless now on sleep's hazardous pillow.

On the street, my morning milk stands sentry at the door;
A paperboy flings newsprint at my stoop.

Look! Abstractions march resplendent in the morning light!

The past convenes on the steps today
As though for a parade.
What is there, after all, but what was?
And it does march,
And it does fade.
Sounds
Accordion
Through the memory.
The click-clack of names, like agate marbles,
Across the hard conversations in my family:
Cracker Burns and Butts Murphy,
Timmy the Woodhooker, and the Gentle Sheean—
Muted now in the metallic music of the past.
Many are dead; the rest, repaired and raging, twitch
in this morning sunlight.
Sights
Of brave flags
And sailor suits
Stifle the memory with the sandy debris of summers
Through which, my brother, you scuffed your way
Toward bald and mealy manhood.
I kiss that daring child in you and clasp your hand.

Wait! Listen to my riddle. It is about you and all of us:
What has so much heart it cannot love,
So much sight it cannot see,
So much soul it cannot sanctify itself?
Give up. I never found the answer.
Now memory, giddy with power, walks across my mind.
And
Down
Down the stairs
To the door
(Death's hinged door.)
I go to fetch this day's nourishment, this day's news,
And to watch from there, the second it's ajar,
The past convene on the steps
As though for a parade.
For what is there, after all, but what was.
And it does march.
And it does fade.

iii—nones: ". . . and above all, Truth."

Our Lady of Succour, pray for us . . .
Amid the veils and vines in that graded garden
Of grammar school. And find, too, some pardon
For changing griefs as the years harden
And the schools after toss loss upon loss.

All my history, redundant and loosely bound,
Bracketed by this lawless alpha-and-omega myth
Of curious symbols: A.B. and M.A.; i.e., *Truth*
Worries itself into a lopsided bauble of crystal, Sooth-
Sayer, lady, to break or to blossom on the fair ground.

iv—matinee: ". . . for the tenth part of a dollar."

"Step up, step up, right up. Give ear and eye
To the whirlpools of light which speak
In multi-colored glances and round-and-round whispers
Of sawdust stars and ambrosial puffs of pink
Fragility balanced as a windowed bubble on the seal's nose.
Everything, heart's own engine, breaks eventually.
Look, ladies and gents, here at Captain Bob Tate,
Petrified Man. Does he live or die?
Does he sing in the confines of that pearly coffin?
And can he marry? Flap, flap flaps the petal
Of his tent's opening: To this Saul no David plucks
A tinny melody. Asquat nearby, his dusty nurse laps
With a lick a moat round her frozen custard's turreted castle.
The wheel spins round a-round a-round a-round . . .
You'll ring a dream with these concentric circles . . .
Step inside, sonny: it's the eighth wonder of the world."

I was there as you were with those
Fountains, fountains everywhere
Feeding on limited water,
From whose down-deep, grim machinery
Abundance spurted, showered, flirted
With those who through a turnstile
Turned the bitter outside inside out
To walk rowdy and gaudy all
Of a topaz daytime, wondering
Much later only if
Dreams too feasted on themselves.

v—a vesper song

The people assemble in their assigned places
with bakery boxes,
Night's promises thick on their hearts and faces
As the evening swoops down in navy-blue birds
To curve an iridescent rainbow over them
In feathers of virtuous color.
How like a warm place come into
Is love. I entered into
Its soft, geometric mystery
Of questions and promise one evening
To find that love too points its purple and terrible moral
As parenthesis to the dream: (Nothing, nothing satisfies.)

No one in legend or in a play
Told of what it was
That urged a virgin yield her womb to God
Or made of Abelard a poet.
I find this guarded page blank as shade.
Know it: nothing, nothing satisfies.
Love's definition is by omission.

Rome and Athens shadow in the broken sun of history,
And war upon war devalues the heart to a souvenir.
The rich crumble, and everything modifies
Into statement here where the poem should shout in the throat
Of the shuddering magnificence of love
Of a thunderous evening. Nothing, nothing satisfies.
Like a warm place come into
Is love in the emerald evening.

vi—envoi

All at once I hear the far down, faint inflection
Of the train bearing the bodies of my friends
Somewhere on its catafalque. Am I to comprehend
Travel, like love and death, making lean baggage of identity?
But the sudden lanterns beacon their arrival and send
Me heart-high down the gravel chasing hawks in grins
of celebration.

A. R. AMMONS:

Canto 13

what does
wisdom say:
wisdom says
do not put too much stress
on doing; sit some and wait,
if you can get
that self-contained:
but do not sit too much;
being can wear thin
without experience:
not too much stress on thrift
at the expense of living;
immaterial things like
life must be conserved against
materiality: however,
spending every dime you make
can exhaust all boundaries,
destroy resources and
recovery's means:
not too much stress on knowledge;
understanding, too, is a
high faculty
that should bear pleasurably on facts;
ordering, aligning,
comparing,
as processes, become diffuse in too
much massiveness:
but the acquisition
of thinking stuff is crucial
to knowledge
and to understanding:
wisdom says
do not love exceedingly:
you must withhold

enough to weather loss;
however, love thoroughly
and with the body
so women will respect and fear the little
man: though dainty,
they will scoff
when not profoundly had: not too much
mind over body or
body over mind;
they are united in this life and should
blend to dual good or ill:
and do not stress
wisdom too much: if you lean neither
way, the golden
mean narrows
and rather than a way becomes a wire,
or altogether
vanishes, a
hypothetical line from which extremes
perpendicularly begin:
and if you do not
violate wisdom to some extent,
committing yourself fully,
without reserve,
and foolishly, you will not become *one*,
capable of direction,
selected to a single aim,
and you will be notable for nothing:
nothing in excess is
excessive nothingness:
go: but wisdom says, do not go too far:

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT:

Hymn of the Angels

Sidney did not much like the old-fashioned facade of the Hilton-Sansom, but, once inside, he found the lobby had been brought as far up to date as wall-to-wall grey could bring it; he was satisfied. Two telephone messages were waiting for him: one, marked urgent, he stared at a moment, then crumpled up and threw away—let the little fish catch him if they could, they'd appreciate him the more for their trouble; the other, from a Father Hilary at Mount Mary, he took with him to his room.

Even though this new room was so Hilton-familiar, Sidney studiously set about clearing it of its hotel welcome and advice and warning, then spread out on the dresser a local paper and read as he wandered about undressing; he moved a chair, flipped on the TV set and saw that its three channels were reasonably clear, scanned the movie ads, brushed his teeth as though he had just got up, scratched his back, glanced over a coast-to-coast columnist: it made the room his own. His eyes were caught by an advertisement for the Club Continentale—from nine to one Sharon Vee and the Happy Hipsters. Sidney perked up immediately, made a grimace at the message from Mount Mary, and put in a call for Sharon.

"Siddy!" She was putting on her little girl voice, which probably meant she wasn't sure yet how glad she was to hear from him.

"How are you, baby?"

"What are you doing in a hamlet like this?"

"Business," he began.

"Naturally business!" she squawked. "You dope, I mean what're you doing?"

"Right now I'm inviting you to dinner tomorrow night."

She purred. "Siddy, you're sweet. Only I can't tomorrow. There's a reason. Couldn't you tonight? How long're you going to be in town?"

"Tonight I'm supposed to go to a monastery for dinner." She giggled. "Business," he snapped, "business. Look, can't you make it tomorrow?"

She purred downward. "Let's just have an early dinner, now. Can't we, sweetie? I really have been missing you."

He liked to be missed. "Okey, honey. Seven at your place?"

"Make it six, at yours?"

It was already 4:30, and he'd eaten a large lunch on the plane. He clicked his teeth in annoyance. "Where's the best restaurant?"

"The Hilton."

"Good, that's where I am already. Get here by six."

"Aw, honey, come and get me? I'll have to wear my costume for the show tonight. Please? I may have trouble getting in and out or something. It's so tight."

His mouth twitched in irritation. He thought she was making him jump just to show that she could still do it. Then he chuckled. "I get it. You've got a wolf at your heels. Right?"

Her purr arched in acquiescence and gratitude, curled up in his lap, and went to sleep.

He called Mount Mary and left for Father Hilary the message that he would be unable to get out to dinner, showered, shaved, and dressed with care. He hadn't felt better in months.

With his $200 light-grey suit cut to the minute, his onyx cufflinks, his blue Sulka tie, he felt up to her, even though she was two inches taller than he. She squealed when she opened the door to him, hugged him, gave him five warm kisses all around his mouth and told him he'd lost weight; she asked him which earrings he preferred. He chose the silver-wire mobiles with amethysts. She wore a floor-length, light-blue sheath that ruffled out just above the knees; it came up to her throat, where it was held by a necklace, but it left her arms and back bare. Her bosom was more pin-up than Sidney had ever seen it before; he knew just how falsy this was, but she was right to fill it out, she had hips to go with it, and she knew how to carry herself. Her hair had a wild look, as though she'd just got out of bed; he appreciated how much it cost to produce that look and keep it in place. When they left her hotel and again when they entered the lobby of the Hilton, they looked good; and Sidney loved it. "We're the best in town, baby," he said, and she cuddled his arm and wrinkled her nose at him.

He half-turned with annoyance at a tap on his shoulder. At first glance he did not recognize the knobby, big, pale face looking down at him; the man wore a black suit, an ecclesiastical collar, and an odd sort of black beret that did not flop, and he had a gap-toothed smile.

"Mr. Goldfarb," he said and stuck out his hand, "I'm Brother Patrick."

Sidney clicked his fingernails in irritation. "Of course." He wanted to punish him for showing up like this. "Sorry. I phoned your place an hour ago. I can't come."

Brother Patrick's face fell. "Sure," he said. "A man like you, in New York and all, meets so many. It's nothing, sir, and of course I'd remember you." His bland forehead puckered. "You could come out to us tomorrow then for sure? The thing is, Mr. Goldfarb, we can't always be sure of Brother Dennis."

He did not look properly off-balance. Sidney introduced him to Sharon, but the only sign of confusion he saw in Brother Patrick was a slight wavering of the eyes when they shook hands. Sharon, however, who had been raised a Catholic, pulled her blue gauze scarf about her shoulders in embarrassment.

"Tomorrow at five," Sidney said. "Can you come for me?"

"Sure," said Brother Patrick. He obviously did not know it was time for him to go, or else he did not know how to; he had taken root like the Irish potato he resembled.

"We have an appointment," said Sidney; he took Sharon's arm and they walked off.

"What on earth!" she whispered.

"The monastery I was telling you about. A record in it maybe."

"You mean they got something *good* buried around here?"

"Look, baby," he said firmly, "anything I got anything to do with is first-class." Sidney gestured about the dining room, and looked Sharon up and down with approval. "First-class."

When they were seated, Sharon looked at him with a tinge of worry in her eyes.

"And you're just here to make a record of monks?"

"Not just."

"What I mean is, what're we having dinner for—old times sake?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

As a matter of fact, he wanted to see if she had some information he could use. But it was so clear she was feeling sentimental that he wanted to make her feel good. Besides, he liked an obstacle such as this, for its own sake.

He began to reminisce. He said he had recently had lunch with Henry, Sharon's former husband, and she softened even more.

"What a sweet guy. How is he?"

"Say," Sidney went on, "what's his niece's name? You know, Lily's daughter."

"Linda. What about her?"

"Nothing. I just haven't heard about her for a long time. It's funny—you know how things keep tying together. Here I'm going to see some musical monks and Linda's father became one. What's his name?"

"Is he out here, Siddy?" she cried.

"Not so far as I know," said Sidney, who knew that he was the Brother Dennis in the monastery. "What was his name back when?"

"Fred Stauffer. Isn't it all funny?" She was looking at him suspiciously.

"He was a good clarinetist too," said Sidney. Having got what he wanted, he set about sweetening her again. "It's really funny the way people drift in and out of each other's lives." He took one of her hands in both of his. "You know what, honey?"

"What, Siddy?"

"I liked smooching with you more than any other woman I can remember."

She blushed and lowered her eyes. "You shouldn't say things like that. You're sweet, though. Now let's change the subject."

"I was soft on you, honey. You knew that."

"Aw sure," she said and patted his top hand. "We were consoling each other on the rebound, and it was good too. Now," she declared and went back to her steak, "that's enough of that. It's a good thing you don't have anything to do with Fred Stauffer. He'd be impossible to handle."

"Eh," said Sidney flourishing his fork, "handling people is my business."

He was pleased with himself. He had handled her without her even knowing it, and he was telling her so without her even getting it. His virtuosity was partly due to his having nothing much at stake with Sharon. He had not expected her to have any important information for him, but had just probed about in case something usable turned up.

The way jerked through industrial suburbs and dragged through acres of stucco shacks and finally eased out among fields of stubble the color of honey.

"How d'you like our car, Mr. Goldfarb?" said Brother Patrick, settling down in his seat and taking off his beret.

Sidney said it was a fine car.

"Sure," said Brother Patrick, "all blue inside—dashboard, upholstery, steering wheel. Snappy, huh?"

"I wasn't going to say anything—not tactful—but I was thinking this is a pretty sporty car for monks. You know?"

Brother Patrick rocked with laughter and the car weaved on the road. "Tactful!" he snorted. "Jesus bless us, tactful!"

"What's the matter?" Sidney snapped. "Don't you think I got tact?"

"Sure, Mr. Goldfarb, sure you have," said Brother Patrick and flapped a hand at him. "It's the tact you'll need for Brother Dennis, that's all."

"Look," said Sidney, "what I am is a recording engineer, not an impresario. Is that clearly understood?" Brother Patrick looked at him slack-jawed. "We can do as good a job technically as any firm in the industry. But the prima donnas, even if they're monks—no. Okey?"

"Sure, Mr. Goldfarb," said Brother Patrick, "I had no idea otherwise." He did not talk again for a good while, and Sidney was pleasantly conscious of his occasional, worried glances.

The buildings of the Seminary of Mount Mary, in Spanish mission style, with thick white walls and arched passageways and red tile roofs, described a great horseshoe on the upper slopes of a mountain looking out over miles of hills and dim vineyards; up the slope two wings extended, and the main building, where Sidney was shown into a room, formed the base of the horseshoe; in the large enclosed area, onto which his windows looked, he saw graveled paths, trimmed hedges, rose bushes and beds of low flowers, an arbor, a statue, small lawns, and a trickling fountain. Despite his hurry to freshen up for cocktails, Sidney allowed himself first a sip of this quiet. He liked it; it was alien; he was not sure how much of it he wanted.

Father Hilary, the director, was standing by the fireplace in the attitude of one a good six feet tall; in fact, Sidney and he were much of a height, five feet five, though Sidney was fatter. From the hearty unction of his greeting and his way of offering the old-fashioneds and from his baby face and bland voice, Sidney sized him up as one who thinks he knows how to handle city slickers. So what? He'd snow him. The table was set for three, and it was obvious from Brother Patrick's big eyes for the table service that he was staying.

"No Brother Dennis?" said Sidney not concealing his annoyance.

"I hope," said Father Hilary dropping his eyes, "you may meet him after dinner."

"You *hope*?" said Sidney.

"Soup is served," said Father Hilary.

After they were seated and the brother waiter had withdrawn, Sidney persisted: "I don't get it. Doesn't he live here?"

"To be sure. But I have given him permission to reside in a building somewhat apart. You may have noticed the small dwelling up the hill above the grotto?"

"No," said Sidney, who was not absolutely sure what a grotto was, "I didn't."

"After dinner, if you would like, we will stroll around the grounds."

He started to go into the history of Mount Mary, but Sidney, as soon as the coq au vin had been served, came back to Brother Dennis.

"Let me get something straight, Father. Pardon me, but I don't have all the time in the world. How come you can't just say to him, 'Come on down and meet a man on business'? I thought he had to take orders. What is he, a hermit?"

"I could, of course," said Father Hilary. "Brother, will you pour the wine please? This is our cabernet sauvignon, Mr. Goldfarb. We are proud of it."

"Great," said Sidney to whom it tasted like any other red wine, "it's really great." More was needed: "Fine bouquet." This seemed to have been a right thing to say.

"Of course Brother Dennis performs his religious duties with the rest of the community, Mr. Goldfarb, but he has set himself a severe discipline, in which music, as you can imagine, plays a decisive role. For this reason he is permitted a seclusion greater than normal."

Brother Patrick leaned over, a conspirator again: "He's a genius."

"Well," said Father Hilary deprecatorily.

"That's what it boils down to," said Brother Patrick.

"Brother," said the director, "we don't want to overdo the matter." He turned, formally, bodily, from Brother Patrick and towards Sidney. "I feel, as did my predecessor in this office, Father Albert . . ."

"May he rest in peace," said Brother Patrick, and Father Hilary flicked a frown at him.

". . . that Brother Dennis's devotion to his work is of such an order as to exempt him from many of the inessential aspects of our daily routine. For this reason, and also for the reason that his performance of his duties has been exemplary, I hesitate to interfere with his music in any way."

"But you're the boss," said Sidney.

"Mr. Goldfarb, in your company you are the vice-president in charge of operations?" Sidney nodded. "You must have a number of employees under you, some highly trained?" Sidney nodded again. "Do you give them no latitude? Do you order them to do this or that without consulting their wishes and abilities and temperament?"

"Am I a fool? you're asking. If *I* try to shove a good man around he'll quit on me."

"There's that," said Father Hilary. "Brother, more wine for our guest. Mr. Goldfarb, we approached you, of all the men in the field—"

"That reminds me, how did you ever get onto my trail?"

"Brother Patrick was visiting his mother in New York, and he has a cousin on the Cardinal's staff." Father Hilary cocked an eyebrow and Sidney nodded. "I was saying, we approached you as the one most likely to handle this matter successfully."

"You mean, on the technical end? You know, all I am is a glorified recording engineer. Don't let all that vice-president jazz fool you."

"Ah?" said Father Hilary. "We were thinking of more than mere technicalities. We had been given to understand you were—well, tactful."

Brother Patrick caught Sidney's eye and they both laughed.

"I gather, gentlemen, that you have discussed the question?"

Sidney did not want to go into it: "As a matter of fact, Father, I do know something about the type of music from a job I had for a high-brow outfit right after the war. But there's another angle to it." He bared his teeth, and watched for reactions. When he punched with a fact he liked the fact blunt. "You see, I'm personally acquainted with Brother Dennis's illegitimate daughter, Linda." As a matter of fact, he had met Linda only once.

Brother Patrick's mouth fell open, but Father Hilary only cocked his head. "Indeed?"

"A friend of mine over in CBS is her uncle—I'd just as soon not mention him by name if you don't mind—and I got to know Linda through him. He roomed with Brother Dennis when he was still Fred Stauffer, when they were in college."

The table was cleared and charlotte russe was served. Over coffee and brandy they sat sidewise to the table, and carefully slipped the foil off cigars which Father Hilary passed out, and lighted them from the urn-shaped, silver-plated lighter on the table.

"I should judge, Mr. Goldfarb, it might be prudent not to bring up the subject of Brother Dennis's earlier life in your discussion with him?"

"If it's all the same to you, Father, I think I'll just play this whole thing by ear." Through the French windows, he watched a covey of cowled seminarians in dark brown robes twitter along the road. "You know, tact? technique?"

Brother Patrick coughed, and belched smoke. For a long time, while watching the dusk condensing in the valley, Sidney enjoyed the feel of Father Hilary's speculative gaze resting on him.

Gardens to Sidney meant public parks, or things that exterior decorators installed in the suburbs; nor was he used to strolling. For half an hour or more the three of them strolled along the garden paths—inhaling the evening scents; passing the grotto, in which he made out a statue of the Madonna; pausing to talk by a statue of Diana in flight, her head turned over her shoulder; circling the fountain, which he learned was fed by a spring—and he enjoyed it. He no longer particularly cared whether anything came of this visit; he was just enjoying it for its own sake, in a way he was not used to.

A tall seminarian with folded hands came up to the director. "The practicing has begun, Father."

"In the minor chapel?"

"No, Father, in the choir loft. Father Bede is on the organ."

"We will be there shortly, Brother. You may go along." He turned: "We are fortunate. The acoustics may be better for your purposes, Mr. Goldfarb."

The main chapel, dimly lighted, struck Sidney as ordinary, and furthermore it had a bad echo. He prowled about in search of a spot suitable for placing a microphone, and found none; he could not see the singers well. In ten minutes he left the building followed by the other two.

"I'm sorry, too much echo. The room's impossible."

"We've got other rooms," said Brother Patrick anxiously.

"Sure," said Sidney, "but, you know, they were just doing straight Gregorian chant. The market's saturated with it, from the best European monasteries."

"Perhaps," said Father Hilary, "we do not have so much to offer."

"Oh, but," said Brother Patrick, "what about the manuscripts?"

They were still on the steps of the chapel; Father Hilary was down below the other two, half-turned as though expecting them to be following; Sidney got a certain satisfaction in looking down at him in the faint light.

"They have yet to prove their full worth. I'm afraid, Mr. Goldfarb, we may have brought you on a wild goose chase. Won't you come back to the library with me? I should like you to meet some of the others of our community."

Sidney stepped down to go, but Brother Patrick caught his arm and leaned down at him beseechingly.

"You've got to hear our counter-tenor," he said. "You could stay overnight."

"Brother!" said the director sharply.

"But Father, he can't go without at least hearing Jerome. What an organ he's got, Mr. Goldfarb. Brother Dennis says it's one in millions. You can hear him in the morning."

"If you wish, Mr. Goldfarb? But no, Brother, I think our guest has had all he wants."

"Not yet." But Sidney's interruption was ignored.

"You may go to the brothers' common room, Brother Patrick."

Sidney, not wanting to interfere with discipline, watched till Brother Patrick, head low, was out of earshot; but Father Hilary spoke first.

"Shall we go, Mr. Goldfarb?"

"Is this counter-tenor, Jerome, in there now?"

"No, Brother Dennis is saving him."

"For what?"

"I thought," said Father Hilary, "you had been briefed on all this?"

Sidney had been. "Here's what I want, Father—I have to be in Sansom by 12:30 tomorrow and I want to hear this Jerome."

"I shall do what is possible. Shall we go now?"

Father Hilary's new tone of voice implied that he was not going to find it possible to do much. The slippery bastard, Sidney thought to himself.

A little after ten, pleading fatigue, he asked if he might take the local paper with him and retire. In truth, he was irked by the priests, none of whom he liked any better than Father Hilary; they lounged in leather-upholstered chairs, legs crossed, cowls crumpled at the back of their necks, and pumped him for anecdotes with famous names sprinkled through.

He had not yet established himself in his monastery room but was still puzzling at a cuff link, glancing from it to the newspaper, when he heard a knock at the door. As he was saying come in, the door opened enough to admit Brother Patrick's flat, grinning face.

"Mr. Goldfarb," he said in a stage whisper, "you can see Brother Dennis right away, if you'd like to. He's walking."

"Bring him in."

"Oh," said Brother Patrick, "I couldn't do that, sir. He's walking."

"Where?"

"Out in the garden of course, where we were before." Brother Patrick anxiously withdrew his head and looked back down the hall. "Are you coming?"

It was trouble and it was beneath him; but he liked Brother Patrick, who was now in his robe and who, Sidney was sure, was disobeying orders by being here at all.

"I'll come."

"Then I'll just step in here till you're ready."

Sidney pointed at the glamor-puss picture of Sharon Vee in the paper. "She was married for a while to that CBS guy I mentioned, Linda's uncle." Sidney had nothing to gain from punching Brother Patrick with this fact but the pleasure of seeing his eyes pop. He liked him. "Small world, huh Brother? I met Sharon in the High School of Music and Art."

"I didn't know," said Brother Patrick, seizing the new subject eagerly, "that you were a trained musician too."

Sidney made a wry gesture. "I got an ear, Brother. I got a grade-A performing ear."

The Madonna was illuminated from below by a small spot concealed in the ground cover surrounding her grotto; otherwise, what light the garden received came from the windows of the buildings, and by now there were only a handful still shining; the moon was new and faint. At the place where the path turned towards the grotto, Brother Patrick caught his arm; when Sidney looked at him questioningly, he put a finger to his lips and pointed. Peering, Sidney made out a very short figure on the path before the grotto, bare head inclined, motionless, stiff. They just stood there watching; as Sidney's eyes adjusted to the dark, he could make out Brother Dennis's head more clearly; it seemed enormous for a man of such shortness. The Madonna in her artificial cave looked pretty. He heard the puddling sound of the fountain; an owl. After a good many minutes, Brother Dennis pulled his cowl over his head, abruptly grew by two feet, and Sidney, who had not realized Brother Dennis had been kneeling, fell back a pace in astonishment; Brother Patrick plucked at his sleeve and they hurried up to the shadowed figure. By reflected light from the Madonna, Sidney could make out something of his features: his cheeks were sunken, his brows jutted like cliff weeds, his neck was scrawny. He stood at least six feet four inches tall.

"Who is it?" he said disagreeably. "Oh, it's you, Pat." He lowered his brows at Sidney, and his large mouth fell into a sardonic contour, higher on one side than the other. "Who's this?"

After his initial astonishment, in which there had been a streak of fear, Sidney was inclined to dislike Brother Dennis, if only because of his voice; Sidney distrusted big men with small voices. But he believed in giving a man a chance.

Brother Patrick spoke. "This is Mr. Goldfarb of Imperial-Lighthouse Records, Brother Dennis."

"I don't want any records."

"No, Brother. You know, I told you already. The Cardinal's office?"

"He is not my Cardinal."

"What harm would it do if Mr. Goldfarb listened to the practice tomorrow morning?"

Brother Dennis shrugged. "What good would it do?"

"I might enjoy it," said Sidney with dignity.

Brother Patrick pleaded. "You ought to let him at least hear Jerome, once."

"He is by no means well enough trained to appeal to Mr. Goldfarb's presumably expert ear." Brother Patrick slumped. "Excuse me," Brother Dennis added, in his thin voice, and started to walk off.

"So," said Sidney, angry but controlled, "so working for the greater glory of God gives you the right to be unkind to a stranger."

Brother Dennis stopped dead in the path, and then, with great labor, turned around, and came back to them. "Why should I make a record, Mr. Goldfarb?"

"Look, Brother, there's nothing I can tell you about why anybody should or shouldn't make a record. In addition to which I want to be open and above-board with you—I'm not sold on the idea myself. I was more or less roped in on this. It's strictly a business feeler on my part, and from what I heard in the church there this evening I'm not enthusiastic. Counter-tenors, there's a market opening up for them. How big, I don't know. It makes a difference what they sing, naturally. So you see, I'm flying blind as yet. All I can tell you about that you don't know already is money. Royalties. Depending on what we think of the item, what we price it at, how big a pressing, you should get fifty cents a record, somewhere in that neighborhood. So—money. Okey, Brother?"

"Money," said Brother Dennis with a scorn worthy of the heavy, dark lines of his face. "Half a dollar a record to titillate esthetes."

"Who you titillate is your own business." Sidney saw the big hands clench. Having got even, he felt generous; besides he was a little scared. "Excuse me. I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

There was a leaden silence.

"Well," said Brother Patrick tentatively.

"Incidentally," said Sidney, "as long as I'm here—your daughter Linda told me to say hello for her."

"Linda!" cried Brother Dennis and stuck his head forward on its long neck.

"Certainly. She's a very fine young lady."

"*You* know *Linda*?"

This time the silence was bronze and rang like a gong.

"Look," said Sidney, angry at the insult but satisfied at having got Brother Dennis so far off balance, "as long as I've come this far I might as well listen to the rehearsal tomorrow morning. Probably nothing will come of it, but I'd just as soon. Where and when?"

Brother Dennis smacked his lips; when they closed again they made a sour and melancholy line. His large, shaggy head swung toward Brother Patrick. "Eight o'clock in the minor chapel," he said in a voice not only quiet but defeated. "We will go through the Palestrina for Mr. Goldfarb." He started to leave, then turned. "Good night," he said and they answered him.

"Good!" whispered Brother Patrick squeezing Sidney's arm.

"What's good about it?"

"Oh ho, as long as he's let you go this far, maybe you'll get to the manuscript hymns. They are what we're after all along."

"*He* doesn't do any of the singing, I hope?"

"Brother Dennis? Oh no, sir."

"With that voice of his he'd better not."

"So tell me, Shary, you're here in Sansom alone?"

She looked huffy. "What do you think I'd be stepping out with you for if I wasn't?"

"You know what Henry said about you?"

"What do you mean, he *said*?"

"I mean he told me once in the strictest confidence. He said he trusted you, the limit, up to the hilt. He said as long as you were his you weren't anybody else's and he knew it."

"Aw," she said, "did he say that?" She stared out over the other tables. "We just didn't make a go of it," she said mostly to herself.

Sidney took the opportunity to glance about; he was gratified to see two men leaned toward one another whispering and side-longing at Sharon.

"Well," she said, resuming her public smile, "tell me about the monks."

"I don't know. It was pretty dull, as a matter of fact—routine. They've got a counter-tenor who may be terrific. They think so anyhow."

"A what?"

"A counter-tenor, a man with a voice like a contralto, only different. Very nice."

"You mean, queer?"

"With a monk, who asks? He don't act queer. Anyway, it was probably a waste of time." He shrugged. She stuck her tongue out a little at him, meaning for him not to worry about it.

He was not sure what he wanted from her; he was not even sure she had anything more for him; but it was always worth while exploring. First, stir her up.

"So what happened to the guy with the patch over his eye?"

"Turk," she said.

"Yes," said Sidney, "the pusher."

"Pusher! Who ever said Turk was a pusher?"

"Never mind."

"I do mind. He was no pusher. He was on it maybe, anyway, he was hooked for a while, but anybody said he was a pusher lied."

"Okey, baby, I believe you. I was just asking."

"You never met him?" He shook his head. "Well, he caught me when I was in Las Vegas getting a divorce from Henry. See, we both had engagements at The Beachcombers."

He watched her tell him all about Turk; watched more than listened; listened more to the tones of her voice than to her words. He was careful not to look into her eyes any more than he could help; they appealed too much, he was not sure for what, but the appeal itself made him uneasy. There was some very soothing mood music being piped into the dining room; so long as she was talking about herself, it wouldn't matter whether he paid much attention to what she said: he allowed himself to drift back into the emotions he had felt for her two years before.

"You know, Shary," he said when he could, "I was just waiting for you to come back from Nevada. I was, and you never came back."

"Come on, Sid," she said rather harshly, "let's don't start down that route again. Okey?" He shrugged. She winked. "For my own information," she said, "I'm just curious, that's all—who'd you ever hear say Turk was a pusher?"

"Forget it. Maybe it was Tommy Gunn, how can I remember every little detail?"

She looked satisfied: "That creep."

"Shary," he said when they were relaxing, "I heard you were in New York this spring?"

"As a matter of fact, I spent Easter with Henry. I was in town and I just felt like seeing him. He's *too* sweet, that's the thing." She began to drift off again; but he wanted her and patted her hand a little more than sympathetically. She smiled. "Linda was there."

"I haven't seen her since she still had braces on her teeth."

"Well," said Sharon, "she's not going to turn the world upside down on her looks, you understand, but Henry says she's smart. She's an oddball if you ask me—no make-up, talks deep like a man, dirty fingernails."

"Maybe she should see an analyst."

"Analyst!" Sharon cried. "What do you think? At that college of hers they all have analysts, Henry says."

"So she's going to an analyst already?"

"Look," she said clutching his arm, "this is private. These are people's lives we're hashing over. You understand, Sid? She's a good girl and she adores Henry and she keeps her troubles to herself. That's something these days."

"Sure it is," said Sidney.

"And she likes it that way and so does Henry and I'm sorry I breathed a word of it."

"Okey," said Sidney with irritation, "what do you take me for, I write for *Confidential* or something? So what does she want to do with herself? Music?"

"No," said Sharon leaning forward, frowning, beseeching, "she wants to be a social worker."

"Sure," said Sidney. The monks had made him edgy and she was no better; besides, it didn't look as though she had anything he could use. He glanced at his watch. "Who could blame her? Say, I hate to do this, but you said you had to get there early."

"She's got her heart set on it, Siddy, you know? A plain-jane social worker? She wants it?"

"All right, all right," said Sidney, "so the analysis is taking hold. Good."

"What the hell," said Sharon slumping in her chair, "with a father and mother like she has, it's a wonder she isn't goofier than she is."

"What's the matter with Lily?" said Sidney perking up.

"You know." But he did not know. "She's in. She's been in for a couple of years. Henry doesn't talk about it."

"That's terrible, it really is. What's she in?"

"I don't remember the name of it. Up in Connecticut somewhere."

"But what *is* it? A bughouse?"

"Aw," she said, "a mental hospital. Not too much hope." Then she glared at him. "Here I am running off at the mouth to you again. Now forget it, see? Just forget the whole thing."

"That's really terrible about Lily," said Sidney and meant it. "You think I got no respect for her? You never said a word to me, okey?"

He had what he wanted. He was feeling jumpy as a cat.

"Damn it all, baby," he said and stood up. "It's tough. Now, come on, we got work to do—you got yours and I got mine. It's been good seeing you. I mean it, it really has."

She was angry and there were tears in her eyes, but he was too edgy to smooth her down again.

At six in the morning the phone rang. He let it ring three times while he lay collecting his wits, wondering who it could be.

"Goldfarb speaking."

"Mr. Goldfarb, I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but there's a Brother Patrick here to see you and he says it's important."

"What the hell does he want?" Sidney roared, but when he heard the desk clerk's distant voice begin to repeat a polite version of the question, he said with resignation: "Tell him to come on up."

He was there in a minute, the gaps between his teeth wider than ever. "I know it's early, sir, but they're running through the hymns this morning. I have it from Brother Jerome himself. At eight-fifteen and God knows when you'll get the chance again. I hope you haven't got any appointments you can't break today, Mr. Goldfarb, I cut Mass and drove all the way in on purpose to get you. This is it."

"Does Father Hilary know you're here?"

Brother Patrick's face fell. "Why shouldn't he?"

"And Brother Dennis?"

"No, but he's expecting you back some time or other."

"You sure are going to a lot of trouble, Brother, and you don't even sing." Brother Patrick just gazed at him. "All right," Sidney said, "you win." Sighing, he lifted the phone from its cradle and ordered breakfast. "I have a luncheon appointment at twelve sharp."

Brother Patrick winced. "I'm pretty sure I could get you back in time."

The trouble was that the Cardinal's office had contacted the Chairman of the Board of Directors, who was both Catholic and the biggest stockholder. Sidney had hoped to get out of Sansom without seeing Mount Mary again, and do the rest of the negotiating, if there should be any, by long-distance telephone. But no; from Brother Patrick to the boss was a direct pipeline.

Brother Patrick steered him towards the minor chapel and then rushed off to his work, reluctantly waving good-bye from the corner. Sidney, finding himself alone in the chapel, inspected it with a care he had not had time for the day before. It was severely undecorated except for the marble-top altar and the stained glass windows; the proportions of the room, long and narrow with a high ceiling, added to the impression of severity. The windows confused him: saints, and ribbons of Latin, as one would expect, but all in modern designs and in color combinations much too striking to seem religious.

"Mr. Goldfarb." It was Brother Dennis, alone. "I had not expected to see you again." Or, as his voice implied, wanted to see you either.

"Well, you know, Brother, I was impressed in spite of myself. I really was. And the longer I thought about it the better I liked it. You know?" Brother Dennis just looked at him. "As for Brother Jerome," Sidney added, "I haven't made up my mind yet."

"The lad needs far more training. It would take an order from the Pope himself to make me expose the lad to the public as he is now."

"I didn't know you ever had voice training," said Sidney blandly. "I thought you were a clarinetist."

"I was," said Brother Dennis, in his voice a new quality that sounded to Sidney like defensiveness, "but for the music we are working on, conventional voice training is inappropriate. I don't know what else I can do."

"Would you mind telling me about these hymns?"

Brother Dennis looked at him heavily, then sighed: "Father Bernard discovered the manuscripts in Rome four years ago. The notation has caused us trouble. They are believed to be pre-Gregorian."

"Really?" said Sidney with animation. "There could be a story in

this, how he found them, in a forgotten monastery maybe? Research?"

"You will find a full account of the manuscripts and their musical significance in a journal of liturgical music, or perhaps of musicology, I have not decided which, within a year or two. It is being written now."

"Sure, but I meant the human story. There could be something good." He was thinking of the record slip-cover: The Monks of Mount Mary Present Lost Treasures.

"There will be no such story."

"No? Why not?"

"Because Father Bernard is dying of cancer and I will tell you nothing."

Five fresh-faced, smiling student brothers came in, indiscriminately young.

Sidney retired to the back of the chapel, where he spent the next half hour simmering down. The singers were facing the altar, and Brother Dennis, though he was facing the body of the church, did not glance at Sidney. They were working on a song the like of which he had never heard; he had to admit that Brother Dennis had got the right four singers to support Brother Jerome's strange and beautiful voice; there was a ruggedness to their timbres which kept each separate from the others, and yet his wholly different-sounding voice gave the four a unity by way of contrast. The hymn had neither harmony nor counterpoint, and its melodic line no tune; the phrasing was causing them trouble, all the more because Brother Dennis himself was not sure what he was after. Sidney could not withhold his respect for Brother Dennis, who was giving himself to this creative interpretation totally; and when, suddenly, Sidney caught the long, subtle rhythms, already mastered by these five boys, his respect became ungrudging.

At 9:45 they took a half-hour break. "Brother," said Sidney catching him on the way out, "I'm impressed. This is a different calibre singing from the Palestrina."

"We have a long way to go yet," said Brother Dennis. "You might not believe it but I'm glad I know jazz; it helps me with this music."

"So the wild man is tamed," said Sidney. Brother Dennis surprised him with a smile. "Say, Brother, you might be interested to know it—Henry has settled down too, in a different way naturally. And he's crazy about Linda, he really is."

"I have renounced all claims to my past," said Brother Dennis.

Sidney knew this was a delicate situation because he had never heard Henry so much as mention Brother Dennis and whenever he had referred to Fred Stauffer it had been briefly and with embarrassment. Even so, Sidney decided, because of his own desire and because of a certain quaver in Brother Dennis's voice, to go on needling; all he had to lose was a prestige record.

"She's going to be a social worker, you know, that's what she wants to do. Well, anyway, Henry's got himself a stable marriage this time, I'm confident. His present wife is an old friend of mine—that's how they met incidentally—and you can rest assured they're doing all right. Henry's grown up a lot in the last few years. He never told me too much about those wild years, just a word now and then. I gather he was heavy on the hooch, and you favored the ladies?"

"Ladies!" said Brother Dennis. Sidney nodded, watchfully. "That is absolutely not true."

"Oh? That's what people say, I've heard it elsewhere too, that you were keen on the girls."

"I was a voluptuary," said Brother Dennis, with blazing eyes, "but I was never promiscuous. Sometimes, God forgive me, we used to stay in bed from the time we woke up till dinnertime, making love, slowly, five and six times, talking about our bodies. We could spend hours. . . . I was luxurious, yes. But Lily was the only one. There was no other. You know Lily?"

"I have met her," said Sidney in a voice diminished with shock.

Brother Dennis wet his lips; the cowl obscured all but the boldest of his features, the deep-set eyes, the heavy brows, the gaunt cheeks, the full and shiny lips. "How is she?"

"Sick. Seriously, so I heard. It's mental. She's in an institution."

"It has come to that," said Brother Dennis and walked away from him.

If Sidney had come here in his own car, he would have driven away at that moment and not returned. Brother Dennis disturbed him in a way and to an extent he could not handle. But having to ferret out Brother Patrick and make up excuses for leaving was more than he felt up to. He settled himself in the last row of pews. There was nothing to look at but the windows. He developed an acute dislike of one in which the colors were dominantly green and yellow, a yellow sheep, a green shepherd. What kind of Catholics were these? He was dreadfully offended by Brother Dennis's confession of sensuality; it had not been a confession even, just a declaration, and expla-

nation, with perhaps a tinge of pleasure mixed in; Sidney could never have said such a thing to anyone of any woman, even if he had done it, which God forbid; a roll in the hay, yes, he had hinted at things like that plenty of times, a conquest, part of the game; but to dwell on it, to say he'd spent all day in bed with a woman who was *named* yet, and to say he'd relished it, five or six times. . . . Even to do it. . . . And for a monk to say so, without so much as lowering his voice, in fact raising it, right in the vestibule of his own church. . . .

The young men returned and clustered in the front of the chapel, chirping in quiet voices, glancing back at him from time to time, giggling. Brother Dennis came in, ten minutes late, and said "Angelorum" to the singers, who made gestures of surprise; Brother Jerome took a position at the east wall and the other four faced him at the west wall. As Brother Dennis gave his recorder an experimental toot, his eye came to rest on Sidney; he frowned; then he fumbled inside his robe and fetched out a piece of slate-grey paper. As he walked down the aisle, Sidney was surprised to see him smiling. He rested one knee on the seat in front of Sidney and leaned against the back of the pew, like a friend.

"This hymn is the only one I'm anything like satisfied with. Here's a photostat of the original manuscript, to give you an idea what we had to work with." He went back.

Sidney tried to study the photostat, but he could not make head or tail of it; he did not know what quantities the signs indicated, nor was he sure he could make out the one melodic line accompanying the Latin text; there was nothing on the paper but words in a script of which he could decipher the first word, *angelorum*, only because he had heard it, and odd musical notations hit or miss above the words. The recorder began, and after a bar or two the five voices joined it.

Brother Dennis had pushed back his cowl as the singers had done, and Sidney was amazed to see that his hair was nearly white and stood out on every side; it looked splendid above the dark brown cloth. He swayed his head as he played, but he beat his right foot to another rhythm entirely. The recorder, the quartet, Brother Jerome, all were following the same line, yet there were subtle variations of intensity and phrasing which gave the effect of a complexity far beyond anything Sidney could analyze. Suddenly the recorder stopped and the four rough voices fell to half volume; Brother Jerome tilted his head back and opened his mouth like a bird, and the sweet tones soared out with a beauty that made Sidney catch his breath. On the

last word, *fidelibus*, Brother Jerome was alone; yet he filled the room. His singing seemed to Sidney to be perfectly voluptuous, an essence of voluptuousness, only safe.

Sidney did not know what to do; a solitary audience could not clap, and besides he was in a church. Brother Dennis walked back to him, eyes aglow. Sidney nodded at him and smiled as best he could; he regretted all his unkind thoughts about Brother Dennis. "We're going through it again; the phrasing was off in a few places. Listen to the suspense in those last vowels, *i*, *e*, *i*, and the sense of completion in that last *u*." He made the sound with his lips and half-sang it; he was no singer, and his voice was weak, yet Sidney got a glimpse of what he meant.

"Brother, I never heard anything like it."

Brother Dennis went back to the singers and began talking to them. Sidney heard a *psst* from the chapel door; Brother Patrick's face was peeking in; Sidney made a circle of his thumb and forefinger and closed his eyes as though in rapture; Brother Patrick grinned and grinned and blinked his eyes several times and disappeared. They went through the hymn again. Brother Dennis ghost-sang every syllable with Brother Jerome, floated him with his gestures, leaned towards him, watched his mouth as though his life depended on every sound. To Sidney, the gesture with which Brother Dennis rounded off the last note seemed that of a man caressing a woman's hip.

The five young men pulled their cowls up and came down the aisle; Sidney smiled and nodded at them, and they glanced at him several times and smiled as they passed. Brother Dennis came up to him.

"It's the best," said Sidney. "I don't care whether there's a market for it or not, it's got to be heard."

"You understand, Mr. Goldfarb, we're a long way from mastering all of them. This is the only one I'm satisfied with."

"That's all right."

"It may be years."

"You're the doctor, we'll be waiting."

"As for the acoustics. . . ."

"Don't worry," said Sidney, "we have a few tricks up our sleeve."

"I was in the wine caves recently."

"Where?"

"In the caves where the storage vats are kept, for the wine to age in. I heard one of the working men singing in a vat he was cleaning out.

It made an interesting effect. I have hopes we may be able to work something out in the caves."

"Anything you say, Brother."

"There is a different kind of silence in the caves. And the sound of airplanes does not penetrate."

"Planes!" Sidney cried and held his nose. "Especially the jets!"

"And it is possible, not certain in any sense, just conjecture on my part, but it is possible, that these hymns were sung in the catacombs."

"Oh?" said Sidney and shivered a little.

"In the catacombs," Brother Dennis said raising his arms, "when we were being persecuted by the Romans—to sing a hymn of the angels in God's heaven. . . ."

"It's really wonderful," said Sidney, and remembered that his mother's parents had been killed by the Cossacks. "It really is."

"The important thing is," said Brother Dennis, his arms descending, "I mustn't arrange too much, modernize in any way I can help. Everything about it has to be perfect."

"Sure, Brother, I'm prepared to go along with you on anything you say. I'll put every modern facility at your disposal."

"No!" said Brother Dennis. "At the disposal of the hymns!"

"That's it, that's what I meant to say. It's the hymns."

Back at his hotel by 2:30, Sidney felt at a loss; he had a half-hour appointment at five for business cocktails and a business dinner at seven and his plane left at ten; meanwhile he found he could neither rest nor read. He told the hotel operator to put in a call to New York, but as soon as he replaced the phone in its cradle he lifted it again and canceled the call; long-distance business would not ease his mind.

He wanted to think about the music and his experience of hearing it, which still glowed inside him. But the music had been so different from any he knew that he had no words to talk about it with, and so had his experience been as he listened. He could not even talk to himself about it. Intensity, strangeness, and loss of words: he shook himself and set his attention on business.

From the way Brother Dennis had not reacted at the mention of a royalty of maybe fifty cents a record, Sidney was reasonably sure he could bring it down to ten or twenty cents. It was obvious that the Order was prosperous but not greedy and that Brother Dennis personally could not have cared less about such things as royalties. Even as he was thinking this, Sidney lost interest in it. Dealing was a

habit which at the moment he was not pleased to have. He forced his attention back onto the royalty business, and it occurred to him that Father Hilary might very well be shrewd enough to hire a lawyer who would hang tough on money. All right, all right: fifty cents was the top, he'd said it and that was the limit. A prestige record they'd be lucky to sell 5,000 copies of—hymn of the angels yet.

At the thought of the song the tiny belligerence he had begun to work up dissolved. Instead he felt hurt. Here he loved the music like nothing he'd ever heard, he was ready to give them sixty, even sixty-five cents a record, and they go hire a watchdog to worry him. The thought of their not trusting him made him not angry but unhappy. Couldn't they tell how much that record meant to him?

On the chance he telephoned Sharon. Her line was busy. He left his number for her to call him back. Thinking of her he remembered the afternoon two years before when he had nearly proposed to her. He'd taken her up to his apartment after a recording session, and told her he enjoyed being with her more than with any other woman he'd ever known. She told him he was sweet, he really was. They'd necked on the sofa for a while, but she said she couldn't do it with a man unless she was married to him. Then he'd said something—he was no longer sure exactly what—about loneliness and old friends and both parties living their own lives. If she'd wanted him to propose he would have done it, but somehow, though he was sure she liked him, he hadn't quite got the words said.

The telephone rang. "Hi, Siddy baby." As soon as he heard her voice—its bold facsimile of affection, its vague suspicion, its publicness made harsher by the instrument—he changed his mind.

"I just wanted to say good-bye."

She sounded sorry and wanted to see him—wanted to just enough, sounded just sorry enough. He started to tell her about the hymn and the brothers, but instead switched over to telling her about the record he was going to get from them and how he planned to exploit it.

"I mean it, Shary, I really do." He did not know exactly what he meant but he knew he meant something.

"It's been wonderful seeing you, Siddy. Thanks for everything." He thought that he felt sympathy underneath the hardness of her voice.

"Keep in touch," he said. In the comfortable, friendly-seeming old shoe of a phrase he felt like himself. She did her purr job on him and he liked it. "I got to hang up now. I got a crowded calendar for the rest of the day." Saying it, though it was not true, made him feel normal again. "Bye now, baby. Keep in touch."

Ruby Cohn:

'Endgame': The Gospel According to Sad Sam Beckett

"It is finished."—the last words of Christ on the cross, according to the Gospel of St. John, are echoed in the first words of Samuel Beckett's English version of *Endgame*—Clov's "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." In Hamm's first speech, he twice declares, "It's time it ended." Shortly afterwards, when Clov wishes to withdraw from Hamm to look at his kitchen-wall, Hamm sneers, "The wall! And what do you see on your wall? Mene, mene?" After Hamm's father, Nagg, tells the joke in which a pair of tailor-made trousers is exalted above God's created world, Hamm cries out, "Have you not finished? Will you never finish? Will this never finish?" Midway through the play, in one of the many duets between master and servant, Hamm pleads, "Why don't you finish us? (Pause.) I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me." Clov says, "I couldn't finish you." Hamm says, "Then you won't finish me." Several times, Clov repeats that the toy dog he is creating for Hamm "isn't finished." Just before Hamm embarks on his own artistic creation, he almost echoes Clov's opening phrases, "It's finished, we're finished. (Pause.) Nearly finished."[1]

As the emphasis on *waiting* summarizes the major action of *Godot,* so the many *finished's* (and variants) point to the death of a world in *Endgame.* "Outside of here it's death," warns Hamm, and in the play we watch death's relentless invasion of "here." The verbal music of *Endgame* has a dying fall.

There are, successively and explicitly, no more bicycle-wheels, pap, nature, sugar plums, tides, rugs, pain-killer, and, finally, coffins. Clov kills a flea onstage, Nell dies onstage, Nagg no longer answers from his ashbin, Hamm and Clov both remain "motionless" at the final curtain. The dramatic action presents the death of the stock props of Western civilization—family cohesion, filial, parental, and connubial love, faith in God, artistic appreciation and creation.

Endgame is a work of stark desolation, in spite of surface farce. When the play was nearly completed, Beckett himself described it in a letter to Alan Schneider, director of the New York production, "Rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than *Godot*." With characteristic irony, Beckett implements the *inhumanity* of *Endgame* by frequent evocation of the Bible which, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, delineates man's *human* role and position, particularly with respect to the superhuman.

Hamm, son of Nagg, recalls Ham, son of Noah. Nagg, like Noah, has fathered the remnant of humanity, but rather than make a covenant with God, he tells a joke at God's expense. Biblical Noah faithfully follows God's commands to perpetuate all species by thriftily introducing couples into the ark, but Beckett's Nagg is indifferent to or unaware of the universal death outside the shelter. Nagg's progeny, Hamm and (perhaps) Clov, seek to prevent rather than propagate life. Even the flea in Clov's trousers is fiercely and farcically destroyed lest humanity start all over again.

In Genesis, "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without." Beckett's Hamm, by ironic contrast, has no brethren and cannot see; his Canaan is circumscribed to the "bare interior" of the room on the stage, and his father is relegated to an ashbin in that room. Biblical Noah curses his son for seeing him naked: "A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." Nagg, too, curses his son, but not with a prophecy of servitude. Beckett's Hamm is master, not servant, in his household.[2]

Hamm refers to his kingdom. In production, his arm-chair looks like a mock-throne, his toque like a mock-crown. He utters high-handed orders to Clov, a servant who is intermittently good and faithful. Both Hamm and Clov suggest that the world offstage perished by Hamm's will. Even more cruel than Hamm's own lust for destruction is that of the "I" of Hamm's story, which, like the play proper, is full of Biblical harmonics and discords.

Hamm sets his chronicle on Christmas Eve, that time of birth, of peace on earth, good will towards men. Hamm, however, describes a time of universal desolation, and of ill will on the part of his narrator-hero. Just as Hamm is lord of a lifeless earth, and sole custodian of its dwindling supplies, so Hamm's narrator-hero rules a similar domain. The father of a starving child grovels before him, begging food. With charity towards none, but recalling a divine charity towards a people in exile, Hamm's "I" screams at the crawling father, "But what in

God's name do you imagine? . . . That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you?"

Similarly, the blindness, darkness, suffering, and above all death that fill *Endgame* may all be situated in Biblical context. The most frequently repeated line of the play is Hamm's "Is it not time for my pain-killer?" Although Hamm is literally asking Clov for a pill, it becomes increasingly evident that the final pain-killer is death. When Clov asks Hamm whether he believes in the life to come, the sardonic answer is, "Mine was always that." The ring of the alarm-clock is "Fit to wake the dead!"

On two separate climactic occasions, Hamm cries out in anguish, "Father, Father!" and, as Professor Mayoux has suggested, "How can we not think of the 'Eli Eli' of that other supreme moment?"[3] Towards the end of the play, Hamm utters several phrases which derisively twist familiar Biblical sayings: "Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbor as yourself! . . . The end is in the beginning . . . Good . . . Good . . . Peace to our—arses."

Since *Endgame* is unmistakably a play about an end of a world, there are many recollections of the Book of Revelations. In the vision of St. John the Divine, Christ says he has "the keys of hell and of death," in ironic contrast to Hamm, who knows the combination of a cupboard which presumably contains the wherewithal to keep them *alive* in their hell in the shelter.

Revelations, like *Endgame,* is full of phrases about light and darkness, sea and earth, beginning and end, life and death. After the destruction of Babylon, a great voice from heaven utters the words, "It is done." In the New Jerusalem, "The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal," even as the length, breadth, and height of Clov's kitchen, whose thousand cubic feet might be a caricature reminder of the millennium of Revelations.

Within the tight text of *Endgame,* the frequency and tone of the Biblical echoes cannot be ignored in any interpretation of the play, and the fourth Gospel seems to me crucial for such interpretation. Not only does the English *Endgame* contain the fugal variations upon Christ's last words, "It is finished," but in this gospel particularly, Christ affirms that He is the light, He speaks of "My father," and "My father's house." Beckett's Hamm has dispensed and extinguished light, he calls upon his father, and insists that his house is the only asylum.

St. John tells the story of Lazarus, resurrected by Christ, and we learn both from that account and the Passion that Biblical corpses are

wrapped in sheets and napkin, anointed with oil and spices. In *Endgame,* Clov is the spice that anoints the virtual corpses, sheets cover Nagg and Nell, sheet and napkin cover Hamm. Only in St. John's version of Christ's resurrection is attention focused on the napkin: " . . . the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."

In most productions of *Endgame,* Clov's gestures which open the play—drawing the curtains at the two windows, and removing the sheets from the ashbins and Hamm's armchair—are performed like a ritual. Hamm's first gestures, too, are ritualistic—his slow lifting of the blood-stained handkerchief from his face; his careful wiping of eyes, face, and the dark glasses that hide his sightless eyes; his methodical folding of the napkin before placing it in the breast-pocket of his dressing-gown. Just before the final curtain, Hamm removes the blood-stained handkerchief—in production the bloodstains are arranged to suggest human features—from the breast-pocket over his heart, so that he can cover his head (where he previously heard his heart dripping).

Only in St. John's Gospel does doubting Thomas say, after the crucifixion: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus then appears to Thomas, who then believes, and Jesus admonishes: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

In *Endgame,* there are apparently no believers—neither those who see (however dimly) nor blind Hamm. The onstage prayer, which Beckett refused to change upon request of the London censor, goes unanswered. The nails leave no print, or their print is perhaps no longer evidence for belief. Several critics have pointed out that Clov is *clou* is *nail,* that Nell and Nagg derive from Germanic *naegel,* meaning *nail.* To these might be added the offstage Mother Pegg, for a *peg* is also a *nail.* Latin *hamus* is *hook,* a kind of crooked *nail,* so that Hamm may be viewed as another nail. In this sense, every proper name in *Endgame* is a nail, and nailhood seems to symbolize humanity, whose role is to nail Christ to the cross. All the characters are instruments working towards the play's opening word, "Finished."

But Hamm is also contained in *hammer,* which strikes at nails, and is an even more active agent in the crucifixion. If Hamm is at times a Christ-figure, he is also a crucifier.

Hamm as Biblical *Ham,* as Latin *hamus,* as contained in *hammer* are slight indications of Beckett's taste for puns.[4] Like Joyce, he has always been fascinated by the power of concentration of the pun, by its multiple metaphoric aspects. In Beckett's first novel, *Murphy,* he quips, "In the beginning was the pun," parodying the opening sentence of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And indeed, Beckett's puns, not nearly so numerous as those of Joyce, are only one aspect of his dedication to words.

In *Endgame,* words serve to form not only puns, but jokes, prayers, prophecies, maledictions, chronicles, poems, and, of course, the dialogue of the play. Clov accuses Hamm, the wielder of words, "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others." Near the end, Clov complains, "They [the words that remain] have nothing to say."

For all their combination into various minor genres, there is an astonishing stinginess in the number of words Beckett allows himself in *Endgame.* Again and again, we find the same words repeated, the same words issuing from different mouths. Although Beckett himself has an extraordinarily rich vocabulary, an impressive command of several languages, he deliberately limits the words of *Endgame*—the "principle of parsimony," as the narrator of *The Unnamable* phrases it. This principle charges each word with an enormous burden.

"Why this farce day after day?" ask both Nell and Clov. Both exclaim nostalgically, "Once!" Nell is still able to sigh lyrically (twice), "Ah yesterday," but Clov defines yesterday as "that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day." Time and weather are both "the same as usual." Hamm, obsessed with himself, still continues to question Clov, "How are your eyes? How are your legs?" and Nagg, "How are your stumps?" Several times, Clov repeats to Hamm, "I'll leave you. I have things to do." Several times, Clov repeats to Hamm, "Something is taking its course," and Hamm retorts at last, "I'm taking my course." Many statements are repeated, prefaced by a "then" of resignation. Whole dialogues are built around a few words, as in the following example:

Clov —So you all want me to leave you.
Hamm—Naturally.
Clov —Then I'll leave you.
Hamm—You can't leave us.
Clov —Then I won't leave you. (Pause.)

Hamm—Why don't you finish us? (Pause.) I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me.
Clov —I couldn't finish you.
Hamm—Then you won't finish me.
Clov —I'll leave you, I have things to do.

Such banal words seem to belong to another mode of language than St. John's Words that are both with God, and God. Nevertheless, I suggest that St. John's opening sentence states Beckett's fundamental and recurrent theme—and nowhere so idiosyncratically and so desperately as in *Endgame*. The disparate elements I have emphasized—the end of a world, Biblical fathers and sons, masters and servants, ritual and crucifixion, word and Word—do finally cohere. But rather than risk a dogmatic statement of theme in other words than those of St. John, I shall turn to its statement in several other Beckett works.

On the occasion of Joyce's fiftieth birthday, in 1934, Beckett wrote an acrostic poem of homage to the older Irish writer, entitled "Home Olga." "Home Olga" is a pun on Homo Logos, or, in English, Word-Man. The poem is quoted and paraphrased in Professor Ellmann's biography of Joyce, and I quote the concluding lines:

Y esterday shall be tomorrow, riddle me that my rapparee;
C he sarà sarà che fu, that's more than Homer knows how to spew,
E xempli gratia: ecce himself and the pickthank agnus — e.o.o.e.

In these lines, Christ and Joyce are coupled, if not confused, as examples of word-men, by whom "yesterday shall be tomorrow." The implication is of a Viconian resurrection, presumably through the Logos which tells tales (pick-thank).

In an unpublished play, *Eleutheria,* written about 1947, Beckett again puns on Olga and Logos. A vaguely authorial hero, Victor Krap, is engaged to the beautiful Olga Skunk. At the end of the play, hero and heroine do not marry, and, as might be expected in a Beckett drama, they probably live *un*-happily ever after. Beckett can see no Victory in the Logos, and the two characters go their respective crappy and stinking ways.

In French, Logos is usually translated by *Verbe,* not by *parole* or *mot.* In the tight prose of *L'Innommable,* the last volume of the trilogy, Beckett slips a *verbe* of Biblical resonance among his torrents of *mots,* into his indictment of *la parole*: *"je suis tous ces mots, tous ces étrangers, cette poussière de verbe."* In the second *"Texte Pour Rien"* Beckett puns, *"Les mots aussi, lents, lents, le sujet meurt avant d'at-*

teindre le verbe, les mots s'arrêtent aussi." Literally, the subject dies before reaching the verb, but more significantly, all subjects die before being embodied in the Word.

No puns on *Verbe* or Logos appear in *Endgame,* but in the opening chapter of the Gospel of St. John, it is written that "the Word was made flesh," and the grossest, most palpable flesh is the mammalian ham. Hamm of *Endgame* is the word made flesh, while still retaining his control over the word. Like Christ, like Joyce, Hamm is another word-man.

By name and dialogue, Hamm is further linked to another word-man, Shakespeare, who is described by Coleridge in almost Beckettian terms—"the great ever living dead man." Hamm, as most critics have noted, is a ham-actor, and contains at least that aspect of Hamlet. Hamm has also been compared to Prospero, and in the English text of *Endgame,* Beckett makes the parallel explicit. When Hamm has told his father his story, and betrayed his promise of a sugar-plum; when Nagg, no longer able to rouse Nell, retires into his own ashbin, Hamm summarizes his situation in French, "*Finie la rigolade.*" But the slang is not translated into English, which Beckett renders as, "Our revels now are ended."

The words, of course, are Prospero's from Act IV of *The Tempest,* and are surely introduced to underline the striking parallels and ironic contrasts between the two plays. Prospero's entire speech is apposite:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

Shakespeare's towers, palaces, and temples are absent from the "bare interior" of Beckett's stage, as they were from the physical stage of the Elizabethans. Beckett's stage may literally represent that container of dreams (or nightmares) — the human skull.[5] If so, each window is an eye, Shakespeare's "great globe" appearing greyly through the one, and his "multitudinous seas" as greyly through the

other. All which inherit or inhabit the globe are reduced to four in *Endgame,* two in their nightcaps in ashbins, one immobilized in his dressing-gown, and the fourth shrunken and unable to sit. The sleep that rounds their little life is deepened to the death which pervades the atmosphere of *Endgame* from its opening lines on.

By Act V of *The Tempest,* Shakespeare returns to comedy, where, by Elizabethan decorum, death has no dominion. Prospero breaks his staff, drowns his book, rewards the innocent, and pardons the guilty. While waiting for him, Ferdinand and Miranda are shown playing *chess.* Which brings us to Beckett's title for his play.

In both French and English, *Fin de Partie* and *Endgame* refer to the third and final phase of a chess game.[6] Chess is, of course, a game, a form of play, as is a work of art. The definition of play proposed by Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* embraces both games and art: ". . . an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility."

Beckett calls his English *Godot* a "tragicomedy," but his English *Endgame* a "play." Hamm's opening line is "Me to play," and the line is emphasized, in French by the desperate overtones of "*A moi,*" in English by a wrenching of normal word order. Like Hamlet, Hamm is responsible for a play within the play—his chronicle. But even in the direct action of *Endgame,* there are constant references to the play as a play.

Near the beginning, Hamm comments, "The thing is impossible." Somewhat later, "This is slow work." Several times, he encourages himself, "We're getting on." After a while, "This is not much fun."

Hamm's "This is deadly," spoken while Clov is offstage, is the cue for Clov's ironic comment on the action, "Things are livening up. (He gets up on ladder, raises the telescope, lets it fall.) I did it on purpose. (He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium.) I see . . . a multitude . . . in transports . . . of joy. (Pause.) That's what I call a magnifier."

As the end approaches, the references to the play as a play are more numerous and specific. When Hamm declares that Clov won't leave him, Clov asks, "What is there to keep me here?" Hamm retorts, "The dialogue." A little later Hamm reiterates, "Me to play," holds his handkerchief before him, repeats, "We're getting on," and folds the handkerchief back in his pocket.

Close upon the end, Clov implores Hamm to stop playing, but he

replies, "Never!" Hamm informs Clov angrily that he is uttering an "aside," then that he is "warming up for [his] last soliloquy." When the small boy is sighted through the window, Hamm hopes that it is "not an underplot." Abandoned by Clov—"This is what we call making an exit." —Hamm utters his final "Me to play," and reveals that from the beginning he was destined to lose, "Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing." His exclamations of "Discard . . . Deuce" recall a card game, and further extend the generalization of play. So, too, the whistle with which Hamm can no longer summon Clov, has an important role in various sports. The futile gesture of blind Hamm wiping his glasses, in the end as at the beginning of *Endgame,* suggests the gratuitous quality of all play, including art.

In his last lines, Hamm haltingly quotes Baudelaire,[7] then briefly continues his own chronicle. Crying out to his father for the last time, throwing away his toy dog and the whistle, crying out to Clov for the last time and hearing no answer, Hamm prepares for his end: "Since that's the way we're playing it, let's play it that way, and speak no more about it, speak no more." Although his final words are addressed to the blood-stained napkin, this penultimate sentence reflects ironically upon all words, which lead only to silence.

The last move of Hamm's game is to cover his face with the blood-stained handkerchief of the opening tableau. The recollection is of St. Veronica's handkerchief stamped with Christ's features (already used in earlier Beckett works). The suggestion is that Hamm's life is a Passion, also consummated at Golgotha, the place of a skull. But if Hamm's death closes the play, is there a resurrection?

Endgame, it seems to me, implies two resurrections—one occurring right after the curtain rises, and one right after it finally falls. As has been mentioned, the opening action, silent except for four brief laughs, is performed like a ritual. Sheets are removed from inert objects, and three people come to life—slowly and feebly—on the stage. Clov's first word is "Finished," but his phrases trail off in some doubt. Hamm, the word-man made flesh, is "getting on" in years. He is blind, therefore no longer relies on knowledge through perception. He has relegated his parents—both their teachings and tenderness—to ashbins and nightcaps. Far, far in the past are those days when his parents rode through France and Italy on a tandem, when Hamm himself manipulated bicycle wheels, when Clov pleaded for a bicycle and rode a horse, when body was in efficient union with mind, and man and his carrier could complement each other.[8] By the time of *Endgame,* the delights of

the body are grotesque anachronisms. Keats' line, "Bold lover, never, never, canst thou kiss," is hideously if hilariously caricatured when Nagg and Nell strain towards each other from their respective ashbins, their "very white" faces like death-masks. Beauty is dead, truth is dead, happiness a subject for farce. But once born, or resurrected, or merely set in motion, Hamm reluctantly yet compulsively forces the show to go on.

Paralyzed himself, he directs the action, even as a director does a play, even as God may be presumed to direct the world. From the infinitesimal movements of his arm-chair to human life and death—all are subject to Hamm's commands, so long as he is *in* command. And yet, his activities are ridiculously restricted to composing a chronicle, to praying half-heartedly when he runs out of characters, and above all to giving commands to Clov, variously designated as his dog, menial, creature, and son.

Early in the play, Hamm makes a prophecy about Clov, and we recall other blind prophets—Tiresias, Samson.[9] Hamm's prophecy ends, "Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. (Pause.) Yes, one day you'll know what it is, *you'll be like me,* except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone to have pity on." (My italics.)

With the sighting of the small boy, however, there *is* someone for Clov to have pity on. Perhaps he does. In any case, a little child—real or invented—is the cue for Hamm to dismiss Clov: "I don't need you any more." Perhaps the small boy will take Clov's place as Hamm's servant, while Clov goes out to die in the desert. If, after the final curtain, Hamm is resurrected, the small boy would remove the sheets in the opening ritual, and Hamm, uncovering his face, would replay his part as hero-victim-director-actor-author. The pattern of such a resurrection would be circular.

But although Clov is the *past* tense of "cleave," he remains *present* to the final curtain. Beckett is rumored to have remarked that in *Godot,* the audience wonders whether Godot will ever come, and in *Endgame* they wonder whether Clov will ever leave. It is evident that Beckett intends the wonder in both cases, up to and beyond the end of the plays.

While the audience wonders, blind Hamm perceives that he has been abandoned, and he proceeds to make himself absolute for death. In the closing scene, "He covers his face with handkerchief, lowers

his arms to armrests, remains motionless." If this immobility is death, and if, after the final curtain, Clov does leave the shelter, perhaps he goes only far enough to fetch the boy, so as to make of him a dog, a menial, a creature, and a son. Perhaps Clov will discover a combination to another cupboard, or perhaps he and the boy, according to some principle of parsimony, will live on leftovers in Clov's millennial kitchen. Then Clov would fulfill Hamm's prophecy with a vengeance; he would not only be like Hamm, he would *be* Hamm, word made flesh, instead of its trivial spice accompaniment. The play, perhaps on a reduced stage, perhaps in a reduced skull, would be replayed with Clov as Hamm. The pattern of a resurrection would be cyclical.

Already, Clov at the beginning of *Endgame* has shrunk to where he needs a ladder to see out of the (eye?) window of the (skull?) stage. It is Clov whose opening line echoes Christ's last words. Like Christ, he speaks of a father and his father's house. In some productions, he stands behind Hamm's chair with arms outstretched as though crucified. Once, Clov implies that "it" can end only if he sings. In his last long speech, Clov shifts from *"They* said to me," to *"I* say to myself." (My italics.) Dressed though he is at the last for sun or rain, he does not actually leave the shelter from all weathers. He may have invented the small boy who will serve as Clov, even as Clov may have been the small boy in Hamm's literary invention.

In all Beckett's later works, there is no way of distinguishing fact from fiction. Their inseparability and irreconcilability is a recurrent theme of his trilogy of novels. In each successive novel, the hero-narrator undergoes further physical degeneration. Ironically, composition takes place during decomposition. Just as dying had a specifically sexual connotation for the Elizabethans, so it seems to have a specifically creative one for Beckett—artistically creative.

The verbal spareness of *Endgame* is a startling contrast to and an ironic commentary upon the unparagraphed verbal rush of the trilogy, but in both works the heroes are word-men, and in both works one word-man is replaceable and (perhaps) replaced by another. In *Endgame,* Clov, Hamm, and Nagg—three generations—are also three stages of physical decomposition. Like Malone in the triology, it is Hamm, the middle member, who is at the height—such as it is—of his creative powers. But as the focus of *Endgame* narrows to the Hamm-Clov relationship, the tension is tautened between creator and creature until, finally, after the end of the play as played, one is (perhaps) replaced by the other, and the whole heart-breaking, absurd cycle begins

again. Resurrection into another and reduced life, into another and slower death, may take place—if it does—only through the play of creation.

NOTES

1. The verbal repetition of the endgame is not so evident in the original French where *achever* and *casser* diffuse *finir.*
2. Mastery bordering on divinity also characterizes Beckett's Mr. Knott in *Watt,* Youdi in *Molloy,* and Pozzo in *Godot.*
3. "The Theatre of Samuel Beckett," *Perspective* (Autumn, 1959), 149.
4. The most pyrotechnic display of paronomasia in *Endgame* is Beckett's translation of Nagg's multi-punned joke from French to English.
5. Roger Blin's set, in the French production superintended by Beckett, was vaguely circular. The interior of a skull—owner unknown—is a recurrent locale in Beckett's fiction.
6. For fuller discussion of aspects of chess in *Endgame,* see: Eastman, Richard, "The Strategy of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame,*" *Modern Drama* (May, 1959), 36-44. Mercier, Vivian, "How to Read *Endgame,*" *Griffin* (June, 1959), 10-14.
7. I am indebted to Leonard Pronko for pointing the Baudelaire passage out to me.
8. For fuller discussion of Beckett's bicycles, see: Kenner, Hugh, "The Cartesian Centaur," *Perspective* (Autumn, 1959), 132-141.
9. In *Godot,* blind Pozzo of Act II denies the prophetic powers of the blind.

ANTHONY OSTROFF:

Evening: Ex Libris

The library thinks of itself I think.
A figure receding into the dusk
Down the twilit stone path
Looks like myself I think

Armed with those vanities
Which fade. Books are dim stones
Builded into tombs. They
Also fade. Whose

Past is dust? Whose dust, past?
Irreversibilities
Are sums, not silences, and they
Grant us fees in dust,

Whose dust is lost in true fee.
The nameless whisperings name the dead
Dead, and yet alive they
Quietly name me.

JOSEPH TANDA:

Lachrymal

The great tear
in which we swim
glints with light
heaves in the sun

The liquid pain
in which we learn
is green again
commends itself

The child's eye
takes as its own
all that it sees
shining with wet

Commending pain
admitting desire
the grey of her eye
the greenest seeing

Affirms the worth
of pain and being
if merely sensate
if simply deceived

And all will drown
o all will drown
child and lover
swim as we can

Triptych

Only the seventh branch bled
the others stood as they had
through the winter
they will never bleed again
red buds to grow green
only the bleeding seventh
will bloom

What can I turn away to
where is no mirror
trees are glass
the streets have glass people in them
the earth I know through shoes
is a plate of glass that sees
O where was I walking when I walked
I turn to find him being
I turn to find myself turning
a glass life shatters at the look
everything bleeds and mentions
bleeding
turns to notice turning
where can I look that is no
looking glass
how may I speak words of love
and my mouth bleeding with splinters
but I speak them
O person in the mirror
to die was a simple thing
to look and bleed to life
is a thing I am dying to avoid

Snow is more careful than crisp
the sound of it underfoot
misleads us
the seed waits
winter is time for sleep
there is time for other things
when snow stops its teasing
pretence at endings

Joe Schreiber Learns to Spin

now this is spinning:
you could tell us the nature of silks

who owning such eyes couldn't bed down
in such a bed on such a night's business

send us your messages later later:
let's see those fine threads

Joseph's spinning more than flesh fingers
more than spleen more than liver
more than his blood than all corpus
all this filament
god if there were god and I were it
would I let you visit
with the tips of those fine fingers
everything touched and untouchable

that's moving now move these matters
marshal them into the soft brown eye
out of your hands all small things all large
by the light of your eye spin them

ROBERT PACK:

The Cry

Fallen upon my back,
I cried in the beetle's voice,
My naked legs
Whirring in the air,
And you—offended
By my ugliness
Because you were a child—
Crackled my body down
Beneath your foot,
And without revelation that redeems,
You skipped away.

And I cried in the mouse's voice,
Whiskered nostrils
Puzzled by death,
And curled soft feet gone still;
In the rabbit's voice,
Twitching my body's twitches,
Blood pulsing weakly,
Like regret, whitening the snow,
In that voice too I cried,
And in the possum's voice,
The red squirrel's, and the mole's,
And because you were the weasel,
Because you were the fox,
The bob-cat, and the owl,
You did the things you had to do,
And because you were the hunter,
You cut from me
The useless parts,
And without the revelation that redeems,
You strode away.

In the infant's voice I cried—
Everything I want

Is everything I need!—
And because you were my mother,
And milk flowed from your body
As from the promised land,
I trusted when you tricked me
Into sleep again;
You put me down,
And without the revelation that redeems,
You walked away.

Not by will
Nor by intent,
But in pure floating
Because without direction,
As birds, winged like fishes
In the inverted air,
Swam through the foaming firs—
There were we held,
Mouth nursed by mouth,
Gorged free of appetite,
When, drowning up from sleep,
Choked with remembered pleasure
And forgotten speech,
I cried out alone
In the lover's voice
For the revelation
That redeems.

Grown wise, humbled
By the daily paper
And the responsible job,
Humbled by marriage,
Exhausted by friends,
Guarded by nurses
Haloed in sterile light—
I made humility my virtue,
And resignation my reward.
And without redemption,
Only with God,
I made no cry at all.

With no cry on my lips,
Reminded something was forgotten,
Dreaming bitterly
Of a promised land,
Puzzled by death
And twitching my body's twitches,
I fell upon my back,
And from my throat:
The buzz, the chirp,
The prayerless whine,
The snarl, the shriek,
The sexual baying
And the death lament,
The sucking vowels,
Splashing of lips and tongue,
Laughter and games
And all the songs sung—
There in my throat they were!
It was my cry,
It was my voice
And all my voices,
Crying—without thought
And without God—
The pleasures that redeem,
To you, who, gladly,
Without revelation,
Went your way.

DAVID RAY:

X-Ray

For Dr. Alvin Suslick

Strangely
my mother's sad eyes
did not show up
on the X-ray
though I had long since
swallowed
all her sorrows
and they should have been
right there—
where the pain IS

nor my father's
old loves
which should have been
THERE
cavorting
heedless of fluoroscopic
voyeurs

nor was the little boy
loveless and snotnosed
who'd been entombed
for sure
there
years ago
in sight,

Perhaps he hid
behind the spleen
behind the ribs
Oh he is out of hiding now
and is drumming drumming
drumming my heart.

ROBERT L. SELIG:

A Visitor for Tom Powell

They brought Powell in drunk from a gutter on Third Avenue and sent him up to the violent part of the city's observation ward in order to be shot full of paraldehyde. When he awoke from an interminable corridor of vivid dreams concerning a long-dead aunt, he had ceased trembling. He heard two voices behind the head of his cot talking about him.

"What an old guy!" said one voice.

"But he's got bright eyes," said the other.

"He'll never get over it," said the first.

"You never know," said the second. "Looks like he's still got life in him."

After that Mr. Powell became a little confused. He remembered getting up and sitting down to eat some sort of a breakfast, and then there was a ridiculous argument between two men in striped bathrobes, and two plates were knocked off the table. One of the men said that he was John the Baptist, and the other said that he was John the Baptist, and it wasn't settled until a man in white came by and said that he would baptize them both in the prolonged baths if they didn't shut up. Both men looked annoyed, but at least they quieted down. Then Powell put his head upon his empty plate and wept, because he realized where he was.

He was still weeping when they brought him in to see the doctor. He told the doctor that his name was Powell, like in Powell's Irish Whisky, and the doctor began to laugh, although Powell was still crying.

"I'm glad you have a sense of humor, Doctor," said Mr. Powell. "It's a saving grace."

The doctor must have liked the compliment or liked something, because, soon after, a gentleman came in a blue uniform and took him off the floor where the men thought that they were John the Baptist. They brought him to a floor where apparently men knew who they were. They showed him his bed and pasted his name on it with a piece of adhesive tape: "Powell," like in Powell's Irish Whisky.

"That was a pretty good one, if I do say so myself," said Mr.

Powell. Now, I'll just take myself a good nap, he thought. And he climbed onto his bed and began to dream. He was going for a swim off the coast of Ireland forty years before, but then he got tangled in weeds and started to sink, until his aunt from Dublin threw him a tea bag and pulled him out by the long string of it, as though it were a life preserver. A funny dream, he thought, still sleeping: there's no telling the meaning of dreams.

When he awoke he noticed that there was a young man in the bed next to his. He was fully dressed and had a crew haircut, so that his head was covered by the merest fuzz. And his face had a peculiar polished expression, which told Mr. Powell that his young friend, like himself, enjoyed a little drink now and then.

"Sir," said Mr. Powell cautiously, "could you tell me how many hours I've been here?"

The young man sat up abruptly and stared at him as though something were badly wrong. "Don't you know," said the young man, "that you've been here for three weeks?"

"Weeks?" said Mr. Powell. "You could knock me down with a feather if I weren't knocked down already. Three weeks!"

Powell threw off his covers and sat up in bed. He discovered to his surprise that he was wearing blue pajamas that were not his own. His slightly torn pajama top had the words "City Observation" written across the front, like the name of the team on a baseball uniform.

"I see I've made the varsity," said Powell. "Why don't you have your uniform too?"

"I explained that just this morning," said the young man, "and I've explained it to you before. Have you forgotten, Mr. Powell?"

"I guess I have," said Powell, rubbing his dry whiskers. "I see you know my name."

"And you know mine," said the young man.

"Do I?" said Powell. "What is it?"

"Harold," said the young man.

At that moment a tall Negro in a blue uniform thrust his head through the open doorway and shouted, "Chow!"

Mr. Powell bowed toward him in a manner that he felt was a compromise between the courtly and the genial and said, "Good morning to you, Sir."

"Afternoon," corrected the young man, who was already on his feet beside his bed. "Hurry up, Mr. Powell, or we'll be on the end of the line for dinner."

"Oh I am bad off," said Powell. "I thought it was for breakfast."

The line, which consisted of one of the worst collections of ruffians that Powell had ever seen, was already stretched two thirds of the way down the hall when they reached it. A huge fat man with a square head, who was wearing blue pajamas like Powell's, pushed in front of Powell's place on the line.

"Some people have no manners," muttered Powell to his young friend.

His friend paid no attention. "The ones in pajamas," he was saying, "are the ones who've just come in. If you behave all right for a few days, they'll give you back your clothes."

Powell pointed towards his own chest. "Why am I still in uniform then? Am I the star of the team?"

"You have to ask them for your clothes," explained the young man. "And you always forget to ask them, Mr. Powell. You also forget where your bed is, and you generally forget that your pants are falling down, which they are now."

Powell looked and saw that it was true: he was about to suffer from indecent exposure. He tugged at the elastic on his pajama pants until he had coaxed them up to somewhere near the level of his umbilicus. "Oh I am bad," he said. "Far gone."

By this time they had reached the head of the line, where the food was being doled out of deep metal trays.

"Hello, Sexy," said a Negro woman in a blue uniform who was shoveling potatoes onto Powell's plate.

Powell looked behind to see whom she was addressing.

"I'm talking to you, Sexy," she said, staring at Mr. Powell out of eyes that looked as though they were sewed on like black buttons.

"Why does she call me Sexy?" asked Mr. Powell. "Do I know the lady?"

"You're her old favorite," said his friend.

"I don't remember seeing her before. Oh, I'm much worse off than I thought. I'll never get better at this rate," said Mr. Powell, and he began to sniffle at the nose.

"Come eat your food," said his friend.

The next morning, or was it the morning after or the one after that?, Powell was called in to see the doctor.

"This isn't the first time, is it, Mr. Powell?" was the question that was fired right at him as soon as he had stepped through the office door.

He stared with consternation at the doctor, who turned out to be a woman. She was a wild-looking woman too: her white hair, which was swept back from a tanned, middle-aged face, resembled the mane of a lion.

"Answer my question," she said and stamped her foot.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Miss—Miss—Miss . . . ."

"Dr. Berenson," she said. "Don't waste my time, or I'll send for the next patient."

Powell moistened his lips with his tongue and sat down cautiously in the chair by the side of her desk.

"How many years ago was it?" she asked impatiently. "Don't take forever."

Powell, who hadn't been able to remember the time of the day up to now, felt his head clearing under the shock of the woman's verbal blows.

"Ten years ago," he said. "It wasn't in this hospital, though. It was the hospital out in the East River, on the island."

"It was for alcoholism, of course," said the woman, more as a statement than a question.

"Yes," said Powell. "Only the doctor took a liking to me, and he said to me, 'Paul . . . .' "

"It says on the card that your name is Tom Powell," interrupted the woman, glancing at him curiously.

"Well, so it is, but when I was serving with the British army in India in 1921, there was an Indian soldier in the company who had a speech impediment and couldn't say 'Powell,' and it came out 'Paul,' and they nicknamed me . . . ."

"Oh stop," said the woman. "Just tell me what the doctor said."

"What doctor?" asked Powell.

"Next patient," the lady started to cry out, but then Powell remembered and went on talking, and she didn't send him out of the room after all.

"He said to me, 'Paul, I'm going to let you out in three months. I'd let you out sooner, but the law says I can't, so I'm putting you in charge of the hospital store to give you something to do.'

"I didn't know how to thank him, but he said, 'It's no liquor store, Paul. The thing I wanted to ask you is can you stop drinking?'

" 'I never tried,' I said.

" 'Do you know why you drink?' he asked.

" 'I think I'm lonely,' I said. 'I had a girl once, but I've never been

married, and my people are all in Ireland, and drinking soothes the loneliness.'

" 'Do you have any friends?' he asked.

" 'One,' I said. 'He drives a cab in the same fleet that I'm in.'

" 'Look,' he said, 'why don't you ask your friend to room with you, and try and stop drinking?' "

The woman reached across her desk and put her hand on Powell's shoulder. He thought for a moment that she was going to claw him with her nails, and he tried to duck away. She held him fast.

"Did you stop?" she asked.

"For nine years," said Powell. "Oh, I had some free champagne one winter at a wedding. And I had a bottle of beer one hot summer night. But that was all. And I saved up money, instead of owing the liquor store, which was what I had done all the years before. Four thousand dollars. I was going to move down to Florida and retire, if my friend would come with me."

"What happened to bring you here?" asked the woman.

"I started to drink again," he said. "Just beer at first. Just a little. I thought I could do it after nine years. I couldn't sleep, you see. So I began taking a little more each night just to fall asleep. And then I couldn't stop. I liked it too much."

"Why?" asked the woman, looking annoyed. "Why after nine years?"

"My friend died," said Powell simply. "Although he was ten years younger than me, he popped off one morning at the wheel of his cab of a bad heart. And here I am still." Powell began to sniffle.

The woman leaned close to his ear and began talking in a much gentler tone, to Powell's astonishment. Even her appearance had changed: she looked more like a tame house cat than the white-haired lion of a moment before.

"If I let you out this next week, could you stop drinking again, Mr. Powell?"

Now that she was being nice to him, all sense of urgency left Powell, and he felt his mind once again cloud over.

"Dr. Bernstein," he began.

"Berenson," she corrected.

"I'm too old," he said. "I'm bad off. I can't remember where I slept last night. When you're still young, you have hope and can make an effort. But I've got no family or friends. When I was in that hospital in the East River, once I got used to being with those crazy people,

I was happy. The doctors knew me and liked me. Everybody said, 'Hello, Paul.' If you could send me to a hospital like that, I wouldn't mind it. I'm worse off than I think. I may not even get better."

The woman doctor picked up a pencil and began tapping with it on the table. "You realize I was going to let you go and that you're making me hospitalize you?"

Powell made a deprecatory gesture with a cupped hand. He felt that a little flattery was in order, so he assumed his fullest Irish brogue. "Of course, you know what's best for me. I know that you are one of the outstanding people in your profession. The name of Dr. Bernstein is well known over the . . . "

"Berenson," the woman interrupted. "Next patient."

His young friend was waiting for him in the corridor outside the door. "How did it go?" he asked.

"She's a very fine doctor," said Powell. "One of the outstanding people in her profession."

So now he was merely waiting to be sent away, and he both dreaded and wanted it. A mental hospital would be the end of everything for him, but it would also be a kind of solution, like death. One day his young friend broke up the monotony of waiting by asking him to go with him to a place called "O. T." They rode up on a crowded elevator, guarded by a tall, hulking Negro. At first Powell was frightened by all the noise of the place: juvenile delinquents with hammers were pounding things, a young girl in pajamas and bathrobe dangled a string of beads in front of his nose and said, "I made," in broken English. A lady, dressed in white, who had a face like a frog, came up to Powell and asked, "What would you like to make out of leather?" Powell looked down for a moment at his trembling, wrinkled hands and fled away from her.

"I think I'm going into the next room," he called to his friend, who was snipping at a tiny piece of leather with huge shears. "It looks quieter in there."

It was quieter. Young girls and a few boys were drawing and painting along several rows of tables. Powell found himself a stool and sat down in a corner, behind an easel, where he hoped he wouldn't be noticed.

A woman's voice spoke to him over his shoulder. "What are you doing?" it asked.

"Resting my bones," said Powell and turned around.

"Have you ever done any drawing?" asked the woman.

Powell looked at her and started. She bore such a singular resemblance to his Aunt Pegueen from Dublin, who had been dead for almost forty years and had taught him how to drink his coffee black and pour beer into a glass without making it foam and had been his favorite aunt, that he almost thought he was seeing a ghost.

"I'm not at all artistic," he said.

She had the same boyish face with the high cheek bones and the short blond hair (Aunt Pegueen had to wear hers short because of some illness), and the voice itself was the same—lively—though the brogue was missing.

She had taken hold of his wrist with her long, thin fingers and was looking at the back of his hand. "If you're not artistic, why do you have that tattoo on your hand? Is it a bird?" She let his hand drop.

"It's a butterfly," said Powell. "I had it done in Bombay the summer of 1921." He looked sadly at its faded yellow. "It used to be much brighter," he said.

"It's pretty," she said.

"When I wiggle my fingers, it flies," declared Powell.

"Show me," asked the woman.

He wiggled his fingers.

"It does fly," exclaimed the woman and clapped her hands. "Its wings move up and down. That's so nice. You say it was tattooed in India? You've led an interesting life."

Powell felt all at once shy and tearful. "It used to be much brighter," he mumbled, pointing again at the butterfly.

She laid her hand gently on his shoulder. "Why don't you draw me a new butterfly?" she asked.

Powell believed that at that moment he would have hung by his chin from the chandelier if this young woman had wanted him to. He would have lain down in a puddle and let her step across him. Sir Walter Raleigh, who merely let the Queen step across his cloak, would not have been nearly good enough for this young woman.

"Draw me something," she pleaded in a voice just like his Aunt Pegueen's.

That was all there was to it, as he told his friend later while they rested on their bunks after lunch. Only, when he came to the end of telling it, Powell found that he had to wipe his eyes and nose on his pajama sleeve: the lady's kindness had affected him that much. It was just before visiting hour. Powell had asked his young friend to stay

with him and talk with him until the young man's visitors came: he would have no visitors and he felt lonely. Only, when his friend saw that Powell was crying, he changed the subject from the nice young lady to something else.

"Tell me about India," said his friend. "I envy you having seen so much of the world. What other countries have you been in?"

Powell began to feel a little bit angry as he thought about the question. He did not really want to end his life locked behind the bars of a mental ward. His life had been too open.

"I was born in Ireland," he said, "went to school in England and saw France in World War One." He rolled up a sleeve of his pajama tops and pointed to a black mark on the thickest part of his forearm. "There's the remnants of a hole where a bullet went through. Baam," said Powell with deep feeling.

"Where else have you been?" asked the young man.

"I saw Africa with the postwar British army," he said. "But I fell in love with a young girl who was the wife of my best friend in the army, so I got myself transferred to India, because I didn't want to make anyone unhappy. She liked me too." Powell looked up at the ceiling as though he saw something important up there.

"How was India?"

"What?" He hadn't heard the question.

"What was India like?"

Powell thought back for a moment over the years. "A wonderful country," he finally said. "They chew a green leaf called pan that makes their mouth all red. Then they spit it out and it makes a bright red stain. You come upon a blank wall in Bombay, and they'll be a red stain on it, because the Hindus can't stand to have an empty wall without a red stain on it."

"Did you ever chew it?"

"Once," said Powell and laughed.

"What's so funny?" asked his friend.

"I was invited right afterward to a tea at the house of the Colonel's wife," said Powell. "When I bowed low, opened my mouth and said, 'How do you do,' the Colonel's wife screamed and yelled like anything. It seems that the pan had stained the whole inside of my mouth blood-red, and some of it had run down my jaw too. I looked like I had been butchered."

"I envy you having seen so much," said his friend. "I wonder when the visitors are going to come."

Powell talked on in order to keep from thinking about visitors and his lack of them.

"I've seen lots of this country too," he said. "I've driven a taxi mostly in this city, but one time I drove a bus out in Los Angeles. I went out there to see what the movie stars were like. A very interesting place it is. Once Greta Garbo got on my bus and had no change but a twenty dollar bill. I changed it for her out of my own pocket, although you're not supposed to break those big bills, and she thanked me like a fine lady to a gentleman."

As Powell was speaking, the Negro attendant thrust his head through the door and shouted, "Harold Green, your visitors are here."

Powell's young friend, looking very excited, got up and began to walk hurriedly toward the corridor.

"Enjoy your visit," Powell called after him and then, rolling over onto his face, tried to stop thinking. Never in his life had he felt so low.

He looked through the dirty window at the head of his bed. In addition to the dirt, the view through the window was blocked by rows of metal bars, like in a jail. But Powell crawled to the top of his bed, leaned his elbows on the sill, and pressed his nose against the glass until he could see. An old, rusty oil tanker was moving slowly up the river close to the Manhattan shore. Rust covered its hull, rust covered its deck, and even its cabins were blotched here and there with the same reddish corrosion. There was a huge dent in the side of the hull just to the right of the bow. Powell wondered how such a banged up thing could keep moving, for move the ship did, until it had almost passed out of the frame of his dirty window. Then he saw that there was a tiny tugboat at the stern that was doing all the pushing. Gray steam poured from its small stack as the tugboat strained and shoved. Powell thought that he could make out the name of the tug in clear white letters at the bow: the Mary T. Prince. Then, without knowing why, Powell fell back onto his bed and dropped his head into his hands.

"Visitor for Tom Powell," cried a voice from the doorway. It was the Negro attendant.

The question of who could be visiting him spun in Powell's brain as he shuffled down the long corridor and peered ahead through the dimness. Perhaps it was some bartender he knew or some drinking acquaintance: somebody who'd heard he was in trouble. His knees trembled.

The benches in the central corridor and the tables in the dining room were filled with jabbering patients and their visitors. The visitors

seemed to make even more noise than the patients. It sounded, thought Powell wryly, like a madhouse. On one of the benches sat the fat man with the square head, still in his pajamas. He was sitting with an elderly lady with a hat on her head and red flowers on the hat, who was feeding him popcorn out of a paper bag. She held it out to him in the palm of her hand, as though she were feeding a friendly elephant at the zoo. She was talking softly to him all the while, and Powell overheard the words "my baby" and blushed with embarrassment. He turned aside and walked on through the confusion, wondering where his own visitor was.

"Hey, Sexy," said a voice at his elbow. Powell turned and saw the Negro lady who had doled out food to him at dinner times. "You're going in the wrong direction," she said. "Your visitor is over there."

"Is that my visitor?" asked Powell. "Who is she? Did she leave her card with the butler?" he joked.

But the Negro lady had already walked away.

Powell stared at his visitor, puzzled. She was a fairly young woman —pleasant looking—who wore a red plaid tam perched on the corner of a fluff of short blond hair. Her eyes, which stared straight back at him, seemed to have been made wide by an appalled kind of innocence. Yet she was smoking a cigarette with a determined air of sophistication, as though she wanted to make it clear to Powell that she knew what was what. Her appearance reminded Powell of someone, though he didn't know who. Then he saw that he had been noticed.

Powell's visitor stepped forward and placed her hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry to see you in such a bad spot, Tom," she said.

"Thank you, Miss . . . ," began Powell, but that seemed too formal. "Thank you, Missy . . . ," but that was too chummy. "Thank you, Ma'am . . ." He groped for the right form of address.

"Don't you know who I am?" asked the woman pleasantly.

"I'm not quite sure," said Powell, unwilling to admit that he was mystified.

"Why don't you put on your reading glasses and look at me closely," she suggested.

"I think I lost them in the street before they brought me to the hospital," said Powell.

"They're in your right-hand pocket," she said.

And sure enough they were.

Powell fumbled with his spectacles, wiped them off on his greasy sleeve so that they became dirtier, and then propped them up on the

ridge of his nose, where they fit so badly that they almost fell off. He peered through them cautiously.

"Oh, how handsome you look with your glasses on," she said, peering back at him.

The mocking smile, the honey-colored hair, the slightly tilted nose were all somehow familiar to him, and Powell felt a surge of affection for his visitor without knowing yet who she was.

"Think now," she said. "When you first met me you were three years old and were standing on your bed waving a wooden sword and when I asked you what your name was, you said, 'I am Sir Bryan, as bold as a lion.' "

"I remember something like that," said Powell. "But it happened so long ago that perhaps it never happened."

"I knew that you really were afraid of just about everything," she went on, "but I liked you for pretending to be so brave. From that time on you were my favorite."

"You couldn't be who I think you are," said Powell, almost frightened.

"And one hot summer when you were only twelve," she continued, "I poured you out your first glass of beer—ice-cold so that you'd taste the good of it—and you drank it down in three gulps, just like that"—she snapped her fingers—"and I said, 'there's a good boy, such a good boy, he drinks up all his beer so dutifully.' Only I never thought that your drinking would lead you to this." She pointed toward the walls. "I meant for you to drink moderately, to enjoy moderately—the golden mean—always moderately."

"I know you now," said Powell, staring. "You're my Aunt Pegueen from Dublin."

She was silent.

"Only, Aunt, I never meant to end up this way."

She looked doubtful.

"If only that girl in 1920 hadn't been married, I could have made something different of myself. When she was taken away, it was like the carrot being taken away from in front of the donkey. The donkey didn't want to move without his carrot."

She continued to stare at him.

"I never loved anybody at all but her. Except you, Aunt. I loved you. I always wanted to tell you that."

She moved a step closer.

"And if you take me in now and let me live with you, I'll try to get better. I'll even try to stop drinking."

She shook her head very very slowly.

"I can only try," said Powell.

Then, as though she were trying to change the subject, she pointed her finger at something on Powell's chest.

Powell looked down and noticed that some buttons were open on his shirt front. He fastened them hastily.

A sudden thought struck him. "But, Aunt," he said, knitting his brows, "you're not alive any more. How can I be talking to you if you're not alive?"

"Touch me and see," she said.

He reached across and gripped her arm with his hand, only he could feel nothing but the beating of his own pulse within his own palm.

His aunt smiled at his surprise.

"I apologize for not greeting you in my formal attire on such an important occasion," said Powell meekly, as he pulled at his pajama pants and checked to see that all was decent.

Then, taking a little shuffling step forward, he flung his arms around his aunt's neck like a drowning man clutching at a life preserver.

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